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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE DEVIL AND THE ROLE OF SATANIC ELEMENTS IN BONAVENTURA'S NACHTWACHEN

by

Roland Boehm

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN

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DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC LANGUAGES

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Reasearch, for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE DEVIL AND THE ROLE OF SATANIC ELEMENTS IN BONAVENTURA'S NACHTWACHEN submitted by ROLAND BOEHM in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN GERMANIC LITERATURE.

.....

Supervisor

.....

.....

Date October 18th 1990

Abstract

As the question regarding the 'anonymous' authorship of Bonaventura's Nachtwachen has finally been settled, and the novel can now with certainty be attributed to August Klingemann, the way has been prepared for more detailed thematic interpretations of what is doubtlessly one of the gloomiest and most pessimistic works in all of German literature. In precisely its extreme negativity, however, can be found one of the most fascinating aspects to the Nachtwachen, namely the uprooting and exposure of all traditional facets of existence. Every known ideal or absolute which might attribute value to life is overpowered and negated in the course of the novel, and nothingness, the 'Nichts', triumphs, by the end of the Nachtwachen, over a universe devoid of any kind of meaning.

The relationship between the 'Nichts' and the traditional values of society, namely religion, art, nature and even society itself is a central theme in the Nachtwachen, and the purpose of this thesis is to investigate and analyze this theme. In so doing, this thesis will focus on both the figure of the Devil, and on the role played by satanic and demonic elements in the text, as both the Devil, as well as the influence he wields, prove instrumental in establishing a relationship between the disintegrating values of man and society and the 'Nichts'. The Devil becomes a form of catalyst, who indirectly aids the protagonist, Kreuzgang, in

the destruction and negation of world, man and self, only to dissolve in the face of the 'Nichts'. As Bonaventura, through Kreuzgang, is coming to terms with spiritual and intellectual ideas far ahead of his own time, it is only natural that he would attempt to utilize the figures and ideas from his own disintegrating world to interperet that which he must confront, but which he cannot even begin to define.

Four major areas emerge in Bonaventura's universe whose exposure and negation betray demonic and satanic elements. With regard to religion, society, art and nature, a devilish cycle of self-destruction begins, each of which terminates in the 'Nichts'. Each of these areas will be covered in one separate chapter. The figure of the Devil, who appears to play a myriad of roles in the Nachtwachen, will be analyzed in the final chapter. The Devil is perhaps the most important figure in the novel next to the protagonist himself, and an understanding of his role in the novel is paramount to any understanding of the novel as a whole.

The conclusions reached in this thesis will indicate that both the figure and the influence of the Devil is crucial in the undermining and 'unmasking' of the world in the Nachtwachen. The Devil helps to introduce the 'Nichts', whose final victim he becomes. The Nachtwachen, then, are less concerned with painting a believable theological and spiritual picture than with coming to terms with the newly created 'Nichts'. In the end, the 'Nichts' proves itself to be the Devil in a newer and more modern form.

Dedication

Fuer meinen Grossvater

Karl Truempler,

der, selbst zu den schlimmsten Zeiten,

den Idealen des Guten, Wahren und Schoenen

treu geblieben war

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my parents and family, whose support, both during my undergraduate as well as graduate years, has been continuous and unwavering. Not only did they provide encouragement, but they were always quick to point out where my priorities should be. My warmest thanks also to Simone for her patience, kindness and understanding.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Current Status of Research

Few works of literature have been as neglected as have the Nachtwachen, whose author remained, until quite recently, anonymous. Having survived to the present day only because early theories as to its authorship attributed the work to the poet/philosopher Schelling, the novel became the target of numerous critiques, which continually centered around the question of who the mysterious author might be. Several interesting hypotheses were circulated, which involved such well known figures as Jean Paul[1], E.T.A. Hoffman[2], Karoline Schelling and Clemens Brentano[3], as well as lesser known authors such as Gottlob Wetzel and August Klingemann. While Jost Schillemeit and later Horst Fleig have, in their definitive works, established the Klingemann-hypothesis as

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[1] The critic who most recently, albeit unsuccessfully, has worked on the theory which attributes the Nachtwachen to Jean Paul Richter is Andreas Mielke.

[2] Rosemarie Hunter-Lougheed has consistently put forward the 'Hoffmann' theory. While revealing, her evidence has been mostly circumstantial and fails to tie Hoffmann in to the Nachtwachen.

[3] While a contender, Brentano's name has been dropped from the list of 'possibilities' since the early part of the century. For an exhaustive analysis aimed at establishing Brentano as the author of the Nachtwachen please see: Erich Frank. "Clemens Brentano. Der Verfasser der Nachtwachen von Bonaventura." Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift 4 (1912): 417-440.

the most probable, conclusive proof evaded the critics until the recent publication of Ruth Haag's article, in which documents discovered in Klingemann's own handwriting reveal, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that Klingemann is the 'anonymous' author who had for so long evaded the scrupulous diligence of the critics.

Most critics, then, were fascinated by the Nachtwachen principally because it offered a chance to engage in detectivework and solve the novel's mystery. This attitude at contributed to the lack of thematic interpretations, a situation which prevails to this day. The question of authorship, however, does have its virtues. Had it not been for the quest to find the author, and the desire to solve the 'mystery', it is probable that the Nachtwachen would have quickly fallen into obscurity.

The Nachtwachen display, perhaps as a complement to its anonymity, the diabolical trademark of being at once difficult to read, and consecutively being almost impossible to interpret logically. "Nun hat die Forschung immer wieder versucht, hinter der Sinnlosigkeit dieser Figur und ihrer Welt einen Sinn aufzuspüren." [5] On every plane the novel

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[4] Ruth Haag: "Noch einmal: Der Verfasser der Nachtwachen von Bonaventura." Euphorion 81 (1987): 286-297.

[5] Gerhart Hoffmeister: "Bonaventura. Nachtwachen (1804/5)". Romane und Erzählungen der deutschen Romantik. Neue Interpretationen. Ed. Paul Michael Lützeler, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980. pp. 204-205.

consistently appears to contradict[6] itself, and every ideal, value or structural element which might be used as a key to unravelling Bonaventura's intentions in writing the work is, during the course of the novel, devalued, exposed and satirized. Only the 'Nichts', which fleetingly surfaces in almost every night vigil, and which dominates the disillusioning orgy of hopeless despair at the novel's end survives intact. But nothingness, while a possible ideal in itself[7], does not offer the critic a useful tool or a solid foundation on or with which he can construct a logical argument or interpretation. In fact, the Nachtwachen, in its elusive incohesiveness, singularly defies systematic criticism, and this should not surprise, as one of Bonaventura's intentions in writing the novel was doubtlessly to satirize the mediocrity of any and every system, be it in society, theology or art. The fact that no critic has managed to satisfy even partially the literary community with an all-encompassing explanation is only further proof of the fact that the work is designed to mislead, and designed to defy interpretation.

> Aber dahinter [the Nachtwachen] ein ausgeklügeltes System zu vermuten, hieße die Nachtwachen mit einer

---

[6] The contradictions arising in the Nachtwachen stem from the fact that any ideal or value which seems, at one point in the novel, to offer the possibility of hope or salvation is exposed as meaningless.

[7] Please see Section 6.5 for an elaboration on this idea.

> Elle zu messen, der sie gar nicht gerecht werden wollen.[8]

The result of the novel's critical indecipherability is the fact that it ranks as a relatively obscure work in the minds of both the reading public and the broad majority of literary critics. Not only is the work difficult to read and to understand, it also offers a bleak and bitter introduction to what was, at the time of the publishing of the novel, still an unknown phenomenon, but to which both artists and philosophers would later apply the label 'nihilism'. The negativity of the novel, coupled with the absolute hopelessness it radiates has earned it the reputation of being a dark, introspective work, which none but the most resolute of readers and critics approach. "[...] Bonaventuras Nachtwachen", Rado Pribic notes, "has been time and again quoted as the gloomiest and most blatant example of nineteenth-century nihilism."[9]

Neither the question of authorship, however, nor the work's nihilistic structure and content have precluded the fact that many critics have attempted thematic interpretations of the Nachtwachen. The criticism of the post-war era, which has produced some excellent results, both in the structural

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[8] Peter Kohl: Der freie Spielraum im Nichts. Eine kritische Betrachtung der "Nachtwachen' von Bonaventura. Frankfurt, Bonn, New York: Lang, 1986. p. 113.

[9] Rado Pribic: "Kreuzgang: The Alienated Hero of the Nachtwachen." Acta Germanica 17 (1984), p. 22.

and the thematic aspects to the novel, has managed to kindle some interest in the work. The encompassing structural critiques, by Jeffrey Sammons[10] and Dorothee Solle-Nipperdey, have not only proved that the apparent structural chaos of the work is, in actual fact, a cleverly and carefully worked out strategy by the author, they also demonstrate that in the Nachtwachen theme and structure cannot be separated. The spiritual negativity and chaos of the theme is echoed in the chaotic structure of the text.

> Wenn mit den Nachtwachen keine zusammenhangende Handlung im aristotelischen Sinne vorzuliegen scheint, so darf dieser erste Eindruck nicht daruber hinwegtauschen, daß darin strukturrelevante Gestaltungsprinzipien wirksam sind, die Beachtung verdienen. Der Nachtwachter negiert Gott und Welt, die Kunst und sich selbst. Diese Umpolung der Werte muß sich in der Form des Buches ausdrucken.

The majority of the other critics who have concentrated neither on the book's structure nor on the question of the novel's authorship have chosen to write on specific themes, in the variety of which the Nachtwachen abound. In so doing, however, many have in some way touched on the theme of the

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[10] While Sammons' work principally centers around the structural makeup of the Nachtwachen, his interpretation of the novel as a whole is perhaps the most conclusive and detailed study done on the Nachtwachen to date.

[11] Joachim Stachow's thesis, Studien zu den Nachtwachen von Bonaventura mit besonderer Breucksichtigung des Marionettenproblems (Diss., Hamburg, 1957), is also regarded as one of the three definitive structural investigations of the novel. It is often quoted and alluded to, but could, unfortunately, even upon request not be made available for the writing of this thesis.

[12] Hoffmeister, p. 199.

Devil which so dominates the entire novel. The books and articles of Russel Neuswanger, Gerald Gillespie, Rado Pribic and Wolfgang Paulsen all represent examples of critical studies which inevitably call up the issue of the role of the Devil in the Nachtwachen. Among recent criticism, Peter Kohl, Kathy Brzovic and Walter Pfannkuche have all, and to various degrees, considered the issue, but not a single critic has yet produced a comprehensive study of the theme of the Devil, the various 'devilish', or 'demonic' processes, which characterize the use of the Devil in the Nachtwachen.

1.2 Theme and Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. On the one hand, it is of primary importance to clarify the role and the influence that the Devil plays in the novel. On the other hand, it is also important to collect and analyze critically the positions other critics have taken on this theme, as particularly in this regard the opinions of the critics tend to diverge. In short, if both the novel itself, as well as the 'Nichts' in which the novel terminates, are to be better understood, it is imperative that the Devil, as well as the 'devilish and 'demonic' influences in the novel be effectively and conclusively scrutinized. The reason for this is that no other theme in the Nachtwachen is as 'omnipotent' as that of the Devil, and consequently we propose that a critical

analysis of this theme will provide a succinct understanding of both the work as a whole and of the various fragments which make up the plot of the Nachtwachen.

Before any analysis can begin, however, it is crucial to note that the Devil, as well as his influence on man and world, had, by Bonaventura's time, undergone a profound change in regard to the theological norms of past centuries. The Devil could no longer be viewed as Satan, the Evil-doer, but had become, rather, a spirit which principally negates, and in negation destroys. In the Nachtwachen, then, both the figure of the Devil, and the processes labelled as devilish or demonic exhibit negative and destructive, rather than 'evil' characteristics. While the term 'evil' can still be applied, to do so would superimpose personal morality on a subject to which it is not applicable.

If the Devil no longer represents his traditional domain of evil, the astute reader might argue, then why have a Devil at all? The answer to this question is contained within the text itself. The Nachtwachen are the product of a culture in a severe state of flux, in which many of the dominant traditions which had guided man and society, both spiritually as well as intellectually, were in the process of being bankrupted, devalued and overthrown. Political upheavals, such as the French Revolution, and the rise of the concepts of individualism and atheism all contributed to force change on a society not capable or ready to cope with change, a change

which to many must have appeared as chaos. What marks this 'chaos,' however, more than any other feature, is its extreme negativity. Neither chaos nor change is necessarily negative, or destructive, and the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the new ideas of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries all proved to be conducive to bringing about positive and humane change.

Along with humane 'progress', however, the changes taking place also brought about spiritual and intellectual insecurity. An entire system of thought, a superstructure of ideals, was exposed and denied, and no new, comprehensive alternative replaced what had been destroyed. It is this insecurity, and the lack of alternatives, which resulted in the extreme pessimism about the changes taking place. The Nachtwachen detail, through the character of Kreuzgang, how one individual perceived and reacted to a world in which all prior values and ideals cease to have the meaning attributed to them. The Devil becomes the representative for the general pessimism and skepticism present in the work.

Furthermore, the Devil's presence can be noticed in a series of processes, which detail the destruction of the systems and ideals valid in the formerly 'secure' world. The manner in which religion, society, art and man's alienation from nature are treated in the novel reflects a certain 'demonic' or 'satanic' process. It is important to put this

word into perspective, as 'dämonisch[13]' became, in the context not only of German art, but the German spirit as a whole, a relatively vague generic label. Demonic, then, at least as far as the Nachtwachen are concerned, can be applied to any process in which the object, be it, for example, society or the ideal of art, is, at first, attacked and negated by the subject. The consequences of the attack, however, result in a negation of the subject, which has, in the process, negated an element of its own identity[14]. The Nachtwachen detail how Kreuzgang consecutively negates both world and man, only to find that, in the end, he has negated himself as well. The 'Nichts' results in an absence of alternatives for the night-watchman, who is confronted by a nothingness which results from the negation of everything that formerly gave substance to existence. Such a process aquires 'demonic' characteristics when the subject, in this case Kreuzgang, is forced to re-adopt values and ideals he has questioned and overthrown in order to survive spiritually. The Devil is one of these 'readopted' absolutes, and, as he is never a totally believable figure to Kreuzgang, his role is inconcsistent within the text. The Devil makes himself, in the course of the

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[13] The spirit of the German word 'dämonisch' is most commonly translated as 'demonic'. This word, however, fails to capture effectively the meaning of its German counterpart. 'Dämonisch' can, when used to convey a more sinister meaning, just as easily be translated to mean 'satanic'. In the context of this thesis the two words will be used interchangeably.

[14] Please see Chapter 3.1 for an elaboration on this idea.

Nachtwachen, indispensible to the narrator, only to vanish when he is needed the most. As the 'negator', the 'Nichts', in which all of Kreuzgang's attempts to unmask the world he inhabits terminate, is the Devil's triumph, as nothingness is the result of merciless exposure and thoroughly pessimistic negation.

What becomes apparent, then, is that thematically there are four major areas in which 'demonic' processes are at work. The first is that of religion, in which the night-watchman exposes the corrupt monolith of Church and clergy. Kreuzgang does not, however, stop with just the Church and its hierarchy. He also 'unmasks' the spiritual Christian superstructure and devalues the ideals which Christianity has attempted to foster. Kreuzgang also attacks the uncaring and mechanical society by which he feels himself stifled and oppressed. While not in itself demonic, a demonic relationship develops between a mediocre society and the individual, who cannot find satisfaction or comfort in the uncaring and mechanical world by which he is surrounded, and whose influences he cannot escape. Art, and specifically literature, are also exposed. The true artist is ignored, and cannot survive in the world of 'reality'. Finally, even the ideal of 'nature' becomes a victim to the 'Nichts'. Man has alienated himself from nature to such a degree that nature, like the values perpetrated by religion, can survive only on an

idealistic plane. Man can simply no longer find comfort in nature.

Besides these four essentially 'demonic' processes, the figure of the Devil himself must be analyzed. After having exposed Christianity and the Church as being, essentially, masks over the 'Nichts', it is obvious that the Devil, as a product of the Christian religion, must play a somewhat vague role in the Nachtwachen. While elusive, however, both the figure of the Devil, as well as the 'shadow' he casts, are instrumental in determining Kreuzgang's spiritual and intellectual world view, or, for lack of an adequate translation, his 'Geisteshaltung'. The 'Nichts', as shall be determined, could not have come into being in the form it takes on in the novel, were it not for the Devil and his influence on the protagonist.

2. Religion and Church

2.1 The Demonic Church

Criticism of the Church is one of the cornerstones of the Nachtwachen. While Wolfgang Paulsen perhaps correctly reminds us: "Um den Menschen geht es und erst nebenher auch um Institutionen"[15]; the Church forms, in conjunction with the judicial arm of the state, the foundation upon which the individual, no matter his station in life, should ideally be able to rely. As such, the Church acts as the spiritual shepherd for the masses, and should offer a haven for the poor and underpriviledged in society, whose lot it apparently protects.

That the Church had, by Bonaventura's time, failed in its primary responsibility as the humane and responsible shepherd should come as no surprise, and Bonaventura's criticism, while unusually harsh, is also consistent with the philosophy of an age in which many intellectuals were attempting to free themselves from the oppressive institutions which had dominated their cultures for hundreds of years. As such then,

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[15] Wolfgang Paulsen: "Bonaventuras Nachtwachen im literarischen Raum. Sprache und Struktur." Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft 9 (1965), p. 486.

the church becomes the object of criticism in two respects, namely as the purveyor of an outdated and dangerous dogma and as an obsolete institution which utilizes all the power at its command in order to maintain its importance and stature within society, even if this means undermining the very basis and charter of its existence. In this regard, the church offers Bonaventura a relatively easy target:

> Rechtsprechung und Klerus, die von Berufs wegen für die Einhaltung der Moral zuständig sind, waren und sind immer dankbare Objekte für satirische Angriffe, weil bei ihnen die Kluft zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit am größten ist.[16]

From the beginning, in his attack and condemnation of the church and its clergy, Bonaventura, through Kreuzgang, is exposing what will become perhaps the central theme of his work, namely the unbridgeable gap between the ideal and reality. In almost every aspect of life, be it religion, society, nature or art, the fact that man's mental and spiritual 'progress' has allowed him to envision ideals that lie, in the present circumstances, outside of his ability to realise, forms the basis for the misery and pessimism, in short the foundation for the nihilism that dominates the work. Especially in regards to religion, however, this chasm between what is and what could be is at its widest and, as the Christian religion itself tends to deal in absolutes, such as 'good' or 'evil', it in itself provides the moral apparatus

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16 Peter Kohl, p. 88.

through which a Kreuzgang can expose and condemn both the institution of the Church, and the philosophy which provides the backbone and basis for Christianity.

Ironically, institutionalized Christianity, it has been argued, is partially responsible for its own fall from power and grace. During the Middle Ages, the Church was not merely a formidable political power, a monolithic bastion of faith vying for supremacy of the Western World with the often divided secular princes, foremost of which was the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. It also incorporated and presided over the one constant factor that held together a multiplicity of cultures, namely a belief, outside of which life was unfathomable and unthinkable. In short, either one could follow the dogma of the church, or one could not, but existence outside the superstructure of Christianity was thought of as an impossibility. As such, Christianity and the institution that represented the Will of God on Earth, the Catholic Church, served as a closed system, and mankind's spiritual needs could be neatly packaged to conform to the image perpetrated by a homogenous Church.

The establishment of the Papacy as a political, as well as spiritual power, served, on the one hand, to enhance the might and influence of the Church, combining, in effect, secular with spiritual power, but, on the other hand, led to the break of the stranglehold that the Catholic Church held over the peoples of Europe and the New World. The Schism

within the Church, which led to the establishment of the Dual Papacy, made it clear that the Church was not infallible. This fact, coupled with the resurgence of scientific and cultural ideas in the Renaissance that fell outside the jurisdiction of the Church and, what was worse, proved Church dogma to be wrong, allowed the possibility to arise that the omnipotence of the Church, both in political as well as spiritual matters, was by no means absolute. This possibility, a mere crack in the spiritual blanket which had enveloped the Western World for centuries, led not only to the establishment of alternate Churches and institutions, but, perhaps more importantly, enabled mankind to perceive and observe its own existence not from within the spiritual 'system', but from the outside. The foundation had been created to allow mankind to study himself objectively, that is, not as an instrument of the Will of God, but as a species which had developed spiritual systems in order both to explain the universe it inhabited and to give meaning to the life that it was leading. This very development, however, while allowing man a choice of how to interpret religion, also enabled man to envision for the first time a universe without any spiritual guiding force whatever; a world without a God, and, ultimately, a world without meaning.

In the Nachtwachen we find this train of thought fully developed. The Church, while not all powerful, retains a position of importance in society, and struggles to maintain

at all costs its position and power. In Kreuzgang, however, the reader is exposed to a character who, while brought up within the framework of organized religion, is now an outsider. Kreuzgang is caught in a 'demonic' conundrum, as he has, on the one hand, exposed the church as a "grausamer Moloch"[17] whose doctrine and dogma simply do not conform to the spiritual circumstances of the 'modern' world. He finds himself incapable of replacing the spiritual security and comfort that the homogeneous world view offered by institutionalized religion provides for the believer with an equivalent system of values. Kreuzgang, in short, appears to dismantle the spiritual foundations for Christianity, and parodies the Church, but, in so doing, he exposes his own hopeless spiritual position which, due to the lack of 'faith', centers around the 'Nichts.'

This 'Nichts', which Kreuzgang encounters at every turn, seems, however, to be, in itself, an offshoot of Christianity itself. Walter Bröcker, interpreting Friedrich Nietzsche, feels that the philosopher traced the development of the nihilism back essentially to Christianity, without which, he argues, nihilism would not have become a spiritual 'sinkhole':

> Daß der Nihilismus kam, das wurde, so antwortet Nietzsche, dadurch möglich, daß die ihm vorausgehende Weltdeutung, die christliche, selbst schon, wenn auch in einem anderen Sinn, nihilistisch war. Sie war es, sofern sie das Leben, die sinnliche Welt, die Realität entwertete und allen Wert häufte

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[17] Peter Kohl, p. 88.

> auf ein Jenseits des Lebens, eine übersinnliche ideale Welt.
>
> Und daß der Nihilismus kam, wurde notwendig, als diese Hinterwelt entlarvt wurde als das, was sie in Nietzsches Augen in Wahrheit ist, - das Nichts. Denn jetzt war mit der Hinterwelt auch aller auf sie gehäufte Wert vernichtet und übrig blieb die reale Welt ohne Wert und Sinn.[18]

As the Christian absolutes perpetuated by the Church began to lose their universal appeal they were replaced by other, no less absolute, values and ideals. "Als dann die Kraft der christlichen Religion abnahm, hat doch die idealistische Philosophie die christliche Weltauslegung weitgehend konserviert."[19]

In essence, then, while the world was no longer forced to think in terms of religious absolutes, such as 'heaven' or 'hell', other absolutes or moral categories, such as 'justice' and 'equality' were merely substituted for the 'obsolete' Christian ideals. Both within the framework of Christianity and without, the intellectual superstructure upon which the Christian belief rested remained intact, and only the variables and terminology which made up the Christian system changed. If absolutes do not remain absolute, however, and are exposed, then a nihilistic world view becomes possible.

> [...] aber das Christentum ist keine geistliche Macht mehr. Wenn das aber so ist, dann ist auch der Deutung der Welt als Schöpfung der Boden entzogen, dann ist nicht mehr die Versöhnung des Menschen mit

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[18] Walter Bröcker: "Nietzsche und der europäische Nihilismus." Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung Vol.3 (1948/49). pp. 162-163

[19] Walter Bröcker, p. 161.

> Gott das höchste Ziel. Dann aber gibt es kein höchstes Ziel mehr, - der Nihilismus ist da.[20]

Key to the retention of power for the Church, both politically and spiritually, rests on the idealized concept of immortality. As long as man believes in the immortality of the soul, or in some form of life after death, the Church can continue to guide and oppress the actions of mankind.

> Bislang aber herrschen Staat und Kirche in einer den Menschen erdrückenden Weise. Dabei wird der Mensch vor allem noch durch das Versprechen einer jenseitigen Existenz, der Unsterblichkeit, verbunden mit paradiesischer Belohnung oder Höllenstrafe, im zeitlichen und realem Leiden gehalten. Der Ausbruch aus dem Leidenskerker beginnt daher mit dem Ausschlagen der Unsterblichkeit.[21]

In order to secure the belief in the immortality sought after, the Church, again ironically, is forced to harness man's fear of the unknown in order to retain its status as an institution. The result, as the Nachtwachen show again and again is that the Church concentrates more on death than on life, and a religion supposedly dedicated to establishing a moral code by which to live life becomes, through the agency of the Church, perverted into a religion which centers primarily around fear and death: "Although religion's original intent in developing the notion of immortality is to provide meaning for life, the institutionalization of death ultimately

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[20] Walter Brocker, p. 162.

[21] Reinhard Finke: "Anonymität und satirisches Konzept in Bonaventuras Nachtwachen." Wege der Literaturwissenschaft. p. 103.

acts as a dehumanizing process."[22] Brzovic concludes that:

> Death, too, must be made subject to an organizational scheme, that is, it must be rendered harmless by transforming the unknown into a predictable entity. Traditionally, this has been the task of religion and, in its more institutionalized form, of the church.[23]

In more than one way, therefore, the Institution of the Church in Bonaventura's time and, perhaps more importantly, as the Church is portrayed in Bonaventura's novel, can be considered demonic. The Church is, within itself, trapped in a demonic spiral, in that it is forced to deal with the consequences of its own abuse of power. More than any other force, the Church is responsible for the loss of integrity that has resulted from its corrupt and decadent hierarchy and its pilgrimages into the realm of secular might. As a result, the Church must now resort to unconventional, and often oppressive means, that make it an ally of the secular state and its rulers. As this is the case, the Church is forced, like the state, to instill fear in the populace, which it does not by promising a richer life in the hereafter, but by invoking the devil and the torturous vision of life in hell.

> In einer verkehrten Welt ist die Umwertung aller Werte vollkommen, wenn das böse Prinzip als moralische Institution auftreten muß, weil die

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[22] Kathy Brzovic: "Nachtwachen von Bonaventura: A Critique of Order." Monatshefte 76 (1984) p. 391.

[23] Kathy Brzovic, p. 391.

> primäre moralische Institution, nämlich Gott, die eigene Schöpfung sich selbst überläßt.[24]

The Church must, as Bonaventura proves, strengthen belief not only in itself, but also in its 'arch enemy'. In this fashion alone, the activities of the Church must necessarily be judged as demonic or 'satanic'.

Stemming from this, there is a further aspect to the demonic behaviour of the Church. It, and the dogma it perpetuates through its primarily irresponsible use of absolutes has helped to create the basis for its own destruction. The intellectual superstructure of Christianity has acted as illegitimate parent and midwife to the nihilism that, as Bonaventura so effectively portrays, is in danger of swallowing everything in its path, including the superstructure upon which it rests. The real 'evil' in the Nachtwachen, as this thesis will prove, is not the devil, who becomes a cautious ally in a time of need, but the force, culturally new, and to Bonaventura's time still undefined and seemingly omnipotent - a force to which a Nietzsche will, some eighty years later, attach the terminus 'nihilism'. Even in Bonaventura's time, however, this still nameless monstrosity was already at work, and as the example 'Kreuzgang' so pessimistically demonstrates, this self-destructive cycle is already establishing itself as the most challenging, albeit negative intellectual and spiritual phenomena of the future.

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[24] Peter Kohl, p. 148.

2.2 A Demonic Example: The Atheist and the Clergy

The episode about the priests and the death of the "Freigeist von jeher"[25] serves as the best illustration the Nachtwachen provides of the behaviour of the 'demonic' Church and of the danger in atheism and nihilism which the institution of the Church attempts to obstruct and reverse. Although Wolfgang Paulsen takes the position, "Man hat die antiklerikale Spitze in den Nachtwachen bisher immer wieder übertont"[26], a point that is borne out in that it becomes very easy to dismiss the actions of the clergy in this example as a negative, but isolated incident. There can be no doubt, however, that this episode explains and demonstrates for us the underlying pessimism regarding religion and Church which forms the underlying foundation for this novel.

The passage in question describes how a priest attempts to convince a dying atheist to prepare himself for the 'hereafter' by conforming to the traditions of Church and state. The atheist refuses, and, after his death, the priest, in company of two others, returns, clothed as the devil, to

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[25] August Klingemann: Nachtwachen vn Bonaventura. Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1974. NW I., p. 11. All further references to this text are to this edition. All references will be categorized by Night-watch (In capitalized Roman Numerals) and page number.

[26] Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 485.

take possession of the body and, more importantly, of the 'soul'. The clergy's plot misfires, however, and the priest is killed by the atheist's brother, who stands guard over the dead man's body. As the priest is wearing a mask, the rumour is spread that the dead individual is actually the devil, and the church impounds the severed head of the priest, which is mysteriously lost.

In itself, this scenario appears slightly exaggerated, even malicious, and thus serves as another example of the extremes around which the world of Bonaventura's protagonist, Kreuzgang, revolves. The extremity of this example only reflects, however, the extremes inherent in the society that forms the basis for Kreuzgang's reality. As is typical for the protagonist, he begins his narrative with a statement that reflects sentiments he quickly unmasks as unfounded, going out into the night, as he says, "nachdem ich mich durch ein Kreuz gegen die bösen Geister geschützt hatte" (I, p.9). Jeffrey Sammons notes the irony in this, the first message Kreuzgang relays to the reader:

> The watchman's simple introductory action of crossing himself evokes what might be called a "stock response" on the part of the reader; he immediately settles down in expectation of an atmosphere of naive piety, naive because of the superstitious fear of evil spirits, piety because of the automatic ritual gesture. [...] By the middle of III, however, he [the reader] has been rudely and firmly jolted out of that category; the superstition abetted by the Church has been uproariously satirized and there is no trace of piety left in the atmosphere because the men of the Church have been

> unveiled not only as fraudulent but also as hateful and, worst of all, ridiculous.[27]

After this somewhat misleading, but very important introduction, Kreuzgang introduces the reader to the two central characters in this, the first of several 'mini-dramas' contained in the fabric of the novel as a whole. The figures are both extreme examples of opposite world views. On the one hand we find the atheist, a dying man and a figure sympathetic to a Kreuzgang, who is in this case relatively unobjective and who comments that this outsider, somewhat reminiscent of the protagonist himself, is, even in death, retaining integrity in light of his ideals. The reader encounters here the first example of a man of the 'new order', an individual aware of the 'Nichts' - the spiritually devoid characteristic of the world he inhabits. Almost peacefully, Kreuzgang reports the Freigeist's passing: "Der Mann war ein Freigeist von jeher, und er hält sich stark in seiner letzten Stunde, wie Voltaire. Da sehe ich ihn durch den Einschnitt im Fensterladen; er schaut blaß und ruhig ins leere Nichts, wohin er nach einer Stunde einzugehen gedenkt, um den traumlosen Schlaf auf immer zu schlafen" (I, p. 11).

The calm atheist's opposite is the excited priest who stands, "mit aufgehobenem Kruzifixe" (I, p. 12) in order to convert the atheist. From the beginning, the reader is, in the

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[27] Jeffrey Sammons: The "Nachtwachen" von Bonaventura. A Structural Interpretation. The Hague: Mouton, 1965, p. 94.

figure of the priest, introduced to a thoroughly demonic character, who attempts to convince the atheist not through a tempting vision of a meaningful hereafter, but by bullying and threatening him with the fires of Hell: "Seine [the priest's] Rede schwillt mächtig an wie ein Strom, und er mahlt das Jenseits in kühnen Bildern; aber nicht das schöne Morgenroth des neuen Tages und die aufblühenden Lauben und Engel, sondern, wie ein wilder Höllenbreugel, die Flammen und Abgründe und die ganze schauderhafte Unterwelt des Dante" (I, p. 12).

From the beginning, then, the battle lines are drawn. The atheist falls completely outside of the spiritual world view perpetuated by the priest, and thus he represents for the representative of the Church not an enemy in the traditional sense. The atheist has become an enemy of a much more dangerous sort, namely one who falls completely outside the spiritual jurisdiction of the Church; an individual to whom age old and inviolate rules no longer apply. "For the priest, life only has meaning in relation to the existence of an hereafter; for the atheist, life itself offers up a fullness which has no need of an hereafter."[28]

The priest, then, has no recourse left but to threaten the atheist. As Kreuzgang reports, however, his attempts have

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[28] Kathy Brzovic, p. 391.

no result whatsoever. "Vergebens! der Kranke bleibt stumm und starr [...]" (I, p. 12). Wolfgang Paulsen writes:

> Daher bleibt es offen, wer eigentlich dem Teufel verfallen ist, der sterbende Atheist oder der seine Berufung mißbrauchende Priester - aber es bleibt auch wieder nicht offen, insofern der Leser seine eigenen Schlüsse aus den Vorgängen ziehen kann und muß.[29]

The more the atheist refuses, the angrier the priest becomes, and to the observer Kreuzgang a profound change occurs in the demeanor of the already demonic clergyman. Kreuzgang begins to describe him as the devil incarnate:

> Ein wilder Wahnsinn schien bei diesem Anblicke den Pfaffen zu ergreifen, und getreu seinem Karakter redete er jezt, indem ihm das Beschreiben zu ohnmächtig erschien, in der Person des Teufels selbst, der ihm am nächsten lag. Er drückte sich wie ein Meister darin aus, ächt teufelisch im kühnsten Style, und fern von der schwachen Manier des modernen Teufels. (I, p. 14)

The importance of this passage has not gone unnoticed in the secondary literature. Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, for example, comments: "Dieses Geschehen dient nur dem ironischen Spiel: Pfaffe und Teufel. Der Pfaffe, der in Wahrheit ein Teufel ist, setzt über die Maske der Heiligkeit noch die ihm wesensmäßig zugehörende des Teufels."[30]

The distinction between clergyman and devil has disintegrated, and even Kreuzgang, who shortly afterwards can

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[29] Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 497.

[30] Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey: Untersuchungen zur Struktur der "Nachtwachen" von Bonaventura. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959. p. 33.

still speak in terms of "Teufelsrolle" (I, p. 14), reports only a paragraph later: "Ich war verwirrt worden, hielt ihn in der Täuschung wahrhaft für den Teufel [...]" (I, p. 15). The result is that the religion of 'love' is mutated into a religion of hate and anger:

> Die Geistlichkeit, die Glauben durch Angst zu erzwingen versucht, sieht dabei dem Teufel, den sie an die Wand malt, zum Verwechseln ähnlich, freilich einem arg theatralischen Teufel. Die Religion der Liebe ist zu der Religion des Schreckens pervertiert.[31]

To the 'Believer' and, at this point, we must remember that Kreuzgang's own religious position is still unclear, the effect is much worse. To anyone who, unlike the atheist, remains an adherent to the 'faith' perpetrated by the Church, and who conforms to and believes in the moral structure as taught by Christian doctrine, this scene becomes monstrous, for the priest quite literally exposes himself as a 'devil'. Even if he is not, in fact, a devil - and on this point the 'narrator' is deliberately vague - then his behaviour is totally repugnant with regard to his calling. In short, his actions and ideas make him an accomplice of the devil even if his robes seem to prove otherwise. "The priest, by pretending to be what he ought not to be, becomes and reveals himself to be what he actually is, namely a sinister and hateful figure."[32]

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[31] Peter Kohl, p. 88.

[32] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 82.

In order to retain power over the soul of the unbeliever and, much more importantly, in order to retain the existing belief in the ideal of immortality, in an afterlife in the Christian sense, the Church has sold itself and has become, as this example so vividly illustrates, an institution willing to embrace both the devil and all related evil in order to achieve its goals. The idea of saving the soul, of preserving the individual from eternal suffering has been superseded by the need to preserve Church doctrine and dogma, and Werner Kohlschmidt's comments can be deemed quite correct when he writes that: "Für diese Anschauung der Kirche gilt der Satz, daß der Zweck das Mittel heilige, uneingeschränkt."[33]

In the second night-watch, the struggle between atheist and clergyman is intensified. In death, the atheist remains a threat to the Church and to the clergy, and the fact that the priest feels himself compelled to pursue the issue only reinforces the fact that the Church is less concerned with the soul of the atheist, than with the public's perception of the event. If the atheist can die without being swayed or intimidated by the arguments put forth by the Church, then he must be a greater danger dead than alive. For he becomes a martyr for his cause. It is in order to re-establish the power of Church doctrine in light of the public, then, that the

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[33] Werner Kohlschmidt: "Zwischen Moralismus und Spiel. Der Anonymus der Nachtwachen von Bonaventura und sein Spiel." Miscellanea di studi in onore di Bonaventura Tecchi. p. 373.

priests venture forth disguised as devils: "The clergy, the guardians of religious faith, turned from truth to expediency, from faith to strategy."[34]

Again the idea of role reversal is adopted, only this time it is almost impossible to recognize the priests who through Kreuzgang's account must, even to the reader, appear as devils. The narrator recognizes nothing at first except "einen glühenden Schweif und ein paar feurige Augen" (II, pp. 19-20), and later notes "verzogene Teufelslarven und Schlangenhaar, und den ganzen höllischen Apparat" (II, p. 22). If in nothing else, the priests are at least convincing in their portrayal of devils, whose function they appear to understand better than their own. Kreuzgang feels himself irresistably drawn to these figures, and joins them, "Mich faßte", he reports, "in dem Augenblicke der Teufel bei einem Haare, und als sie die Gasse herauffuhren, mischte ich mich rasch unter sie" (II, p. 22). He even addresses the devils as brethren:"'Ich bin eures Gleichen, Brüder, ich mache mit euch Gemeinschaft!'" (II, p. 22).

At this moment, in what is doubtlessly one of the most comical moments in the novel, the devil/priests resort to their original calling, and threaten the night-watchman not,

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[34] Rado Pribic: Bonaventura's "Nachtwachen" and Dostoevsky's "Notes from the Underground." Slawische Beiträge 79. München: Otto Sagner, 1974. p. 143.

as one might expect of devils, with fire and brimstone, but with excommunication.

> An der Sprache mochten sie es endlich weg haben, daß ich nicht einer ihres Gleichen wäre, und sie fuhren alle drei auf mich ein, und sprachen nun gar in einem ächt klerischen Tone von Excommuniziren, u. d. gl. wenn ich sie in ihrer Handthierung stören würde. (II, p. 34)

While another level in the role play between devil and priest has, at this moment, been unveiled, the priests remain true to their characters. They bully and threaten, and again reveal themselves to be malicious and demonic characters. The 'costume' they choose, be it either a priestly robe or a devil's mask, has little, if any impact on their behaviour.

This demonic behaviour, which is slowly but steadily intensified, is brought even more sharply into focus when the priests invade the sanctity of the atheist's home. The mission of the priests to have the corpse of the atheist kidnapped by devils is especially malicious when one considers that the family of the atheist is, ironically enough, depicted as a group of pious and, in the context of 'faith' in the Christian sense, upright individuals. To the same degree that the atheist was an unbeliever, the family believes, as becomes obvious in Kreuzgang's description of the humble family scene gathered around the atheist's bedside:

> Durch eine lange, wenig erleuchtete Halle, schaute man in eine schwarz behängte Nische; dort knieten unbeweglich die drei Knaben und die blasse Mutter vor einem Altare - die Gruppe der Niobe mit ihren Kindern - in stummes angstvolles Gebet versunken,

> um Leib und Seele des Verstorbenen dem Teufel, dem der Pfaff sie zugesprochen, zu entreißen (II, p. 21).

Even the atheist's brother is a staunch believer: "Der Bruder des Abgeschiedenen allein, ein Soldat, hielt im festen sichern Glauben an den Himmel und an seinen eigenen Muth, der es mit dem Teufel selbst aufzunehmen wagte, Wache an dem Sarge" (II, p. 21).

The invasion of this home and family environment, then, seems to be an act of ultimate callousness on behalf of the Church. Not only have the clergy concocted a plot of fiendish proportions in order to safeguard their standing in the community, but they are deliberately causing misery to those who, perhaps even somewhat naively, remain dependent on the doctrine handed out by the Church. The Church has, in every respect, sold out its own morals, and is committing acts of evil the dimensions of which the devil himself could not hope to rival.

> The priest's attempt to kidnap the atheist's corpse, with the intent of explaining the body's disappearance as an act of the devil, reveals the lengths to which the church will go in maintaining the continued belief in its own dogma.[35]

As a result a curious form of dialectic becomes visible in the actions of the clergymen. In order to achieve a petty form of revenge on the family of the atheist and in order to provide credence to their own dogma publicly, the priests

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[35] Kathy Brzovic, p. 392.

actively lobby, according to Rado Pribic, "in order to save the vanishing belief in the devil".[36] This is done, so Judith Pond, to "increase the people's dependence on the church."[37] The Church, at least in Bonaventura's world, cannot sustain belief through its own values alone, but is forced to harness the values and absolutes which it has supposedly always fought against in order to survive on a spiritual level.

Unfortunately, the 'devils'' plans go awry. The power of 'faith', and this is perhaps the biggest joke of all, conquers the power of 'darkness', in this case the Church. The atheist's brother, in the battle for the corpse, decapitates one of the priests. The result is a possible embarrassment for the Church:

> [...] the devilish priests masquerading as devils, and the compounded embarrassment of the Church which, in order to avoid identification of the dead priest, claps his severed head into a locked reliquary and thus inadvertantly gives rise to the dangerous belief that the devil has been killed [...].[38]

Not only does the possibility exist that the priest may be recognized, but, much more importantly, the Church, which, as has been proven, relies heavily on the devil for its own moral credibility, must now face the possibility that one of the pillars of its spiritual superstructure is unmasked as absurd.

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[36] Rado Pribic, Slawische Beiträge, p. 113.

[37] Judith A. Pond: Rejection. The Problem of the Artist in Bonaventura's "Nachtwachen". Masters Thesis, Queens, 1980. p. 25.

[38] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 39.

If God is omnipotent, then the devil must be, at least as far as the average Christian is concerned, also omnipotent[39]. Who would, after all, be frightened of a devil who could lose his head and die, like any common mortal, in a battle with an ordinary soldier? The result of the aborted action, then, is a cover up that makes the church appear absurd and ridiculous. The priests appear more demonic than ever, attempting to reinforce the belief in the devil: "Die Pfaffen schrien sich von den Kanzeln heiser und behaupteten ohne weiteres, daß ein Teufel auch ohne Kopf bestehen könne [...]" (III, p. 27). Furthermore, a legal investigation conducted on behalf of the state is sabotaged by the Church, which impounds the head that soon afterwards mysteriously disappears:

> [...] jezt mischte sich plötzlich die Kirche ins Spiel, und erklärte daß sie bei solchen Entscheidungen als die erste und lezte Instanz anzusehen sei, sie ließ sich den Schädel ausliefern, und wie es bald darauf hieß, war er verschwunden, und mehrere der geistlichen Herren wollten in der Nachtstunde den Teufel selbst gesehen haben, wie er den ihm fehlenden Kopf wieder mit sich nahm. (III, p. 27)

Stability returns, and the Church even benefits from its bungled affair. It has managed, through lies and showmanship, to perform religious miracles and has retained an extra lease on the life of its dogma by managing to revive superstition through farcical trickery. Only Kreuzgang and the reader

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[39] This idea is not new to the Nachtwachen. Milton's Paradise Lost, for example, is a work that goes to great lengths to prove this theory to the reader.

appear aware of the real circumstances, and the protagonist discreetly informs the reader, just to make sure, that the priest who had presided over the atheist's death had recently died in rather mysterious circumstances. Kreuzgang concludes the episode by remarking, with biting satire, that the priest's corpse was buried before anyone had had the chance to view it: "denn den Leichnam selbst hatte kein Profaner gesehen, weil er, der warmen Jahrszeit wegen, schnell beigesetzt werden mußte" (III, p. 28).

Criticism of the Church and clergy is not limited to this one episode for it resurfaces sporadically as, for example, in the tenth night watch, when the nuns bury one of their own alive, in this case a sister who has given birth to a child (X, p. 131). Again, the demonic brutality of the clergy becomes visible. "Maria's death represents rejection in its most inhuman form. Having 'renounced life' themselves, the jealous nuns 'take revenge on life' by murdering the one among them who failed to conform to the convent's rules."[40] No other episode, however, as clearly and bitterly exposes the Church as does the example with the atheist. If Bonaventura had continued to unmask the Church with the intensity with which he had begun the novel, the Nachtwachen would take on the appearance of being merely an example of a fictional pamphlet,

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[40] Judith Pond, p. 43.

dedicated solely to the destruction of Church and Church doctrine.

Before the question of how Kreuzgang fits into the theological framework of his day can be addressed, however, there is one final point remaining regarding the episode discussed above. While Kreuzgang has exposed the manipulations of an evil Church, he does seem to support the atheist, in whom he apparently sees a peaceful alternative to the spiritual corruption of the Church. In this belief, however, rests another of the underlying ironies which characterize the Nachtwachen. Kreuzgang idealizes the 'Freigeist' in much the same manner in which he idealizes Hans Sachs and Jakob Böhme (see Chapter 3). Both Böhme and the atheist represent worlds which unlike Kreuzgang's own, are not marred by spiritual chaos. Böhme represents the ideal of the past, in which religious harmony still existed, and in which the Christian doctrine at least appears to be universal; while the atheist seems to represent the ideal of the future, which offers freedom not only of belief, but also a freedom from the conscience which, at least in Kreuzgang's time, still dictates that a world without a hereafter is a world without meaning. How closely Böhme and the atheist are linked in Kreuzgang's mind becomes apparent in the connections he makes between the two. As the atheist dies, Kreuzgang imagines him to hear the same harmonious music that he imagines Böhme to have heard as he died: "So entschlummerte Jakob Böhme, indem er die ferne

Musik vernahm, die Niemand, ausser dem Sterbenden hörte." (I, p. 16)

It is exactly in making this association between the atheist and an ideal of harmony, however, where the ultimate irony behind this episode lies, an irony which Kreuzgang is not yet capable of exposing. While the Church represents a repressive and obsolete order, the atheist's lack of belief forms the foundation for Kreuzgang's own misery and lack of identity. The atheist serves as an early model for the spiritual vacuum, the 'Nichts' which ultimately consumes not only religion, but every aspect of society. The Nachtwachen are, writes Walter Hof:

> [...] ein Werk, das zugleich voller Gift ist gegen die alten Vertreter des Kategorischen, die "Pfaffen", und Partei ergreift für den "Freigeist", ahnungslos darüber, daß gerade die von diesem geschaffene Weltsicht die Ursache des Leidens ist.[41]

Another, less visible, but equally demonic cycle is therefore born, in which the example Kreuzgang has no alternatives, and no way out. He cannot possibly, after witnessing this example, follow and believe in Church doctrine. Yet, if he adopts the chaos that forms the intellectual superstructure of the atheist, as indeed he necessarily does, he will be caught up in an all encompassing nihilism. While Kreuzgang is exposed to new freedoms, he also becomes a frustrated victim, for whom

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[41] Walter Hof: "Stufen des Nihilismus. Nihilistische Strömungen in der deutschen Literatur vom Sturm und Drang bis zur Gegenwart." Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift 13 (1963): p. 406.

the comforts of spiritual guidelines and values no longer exist.

2.3 Kreuzgang: An Example of Religious Frustration

Kreuzgang, as narrator of the Nachtwachen, cannot, as is the case with the atheist, completely realize himself outside of the perspective of organized religion. His mother, after Kreuzgang's conception in the presence of the devil, played the infant Kreuzgang into the hands of the shoemaker, in order that he may be brought up a Christian. In her own words: "Als du geboren wurdest, hatte ich soviel Gewissenhaftigkeit dich in christliche Hände zu übergeben, und spielte dich darum jenem Schatzgräber zu, der dich erzog." (XVI, p. 188) Kreuzgang thus, without a doubt, is the product of a world view anchored in the Christian tradition.

Furthermore, Kreuzgang is the product of specifically one of the Christian 'ideologies', namely Catholicism. In the Nachtwachen, as in most Romantic literature, the mysticism associated with the Catholic Church, as well as its heritage as the original 'home' to the Christian belief make it, in Bonaventura's time, the most attractive of the many splintered Christian sects. "Der Verfasser [of the Nachtwachen]", Erich Frank reasons, "muß wohl Katholik sein; denn nur wer von Kindheit an im katholischen Vorstellungskreise groß geworden, kann so eingehende Kenntnisse und Anschauungen von dem inneren

Leben der Kirche besitzen, wie sie die Nachtwachen überall verraten."[42]

Unlike many of the other Romantic works, however, there is no return for Kreuzgang in the Nachtwachen to the motherly bosom of the Catholic Church. The Church is mercilessly exposed as a hypocritical and corrupt institution, which no longer conforms to the spiritual demands of the time, and Erich Frank writes: "Es geht vielmehr eine ganz erbitterte satirische Stimmung gegen die eigene Kirche durch das ganze Buch"[43] concluding that in Kreuzgang the reader finds a character who has grown up within the spirtual boundaries of Catholicism, but who has come into conflict with the Church of his youth: "So erbittert spricht aber niemand, der nicht selbst innerhalb der Kirche groß geworden und mit ihr in Konflikt geraten ist."[44] It should be added, however, that after analyzing Kreuzgang's intellectual evolution it would appear natural that a doubter and sceptic such as Kreuzgang should necessarily come into conflict with the Church, not only in relation to the institution's political position, but also on a spiritual level.

When analyzing the figure of Kreuzgang, however, the question becomes one regarding the nature of Kreuzgang's

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[42] Erich Frank: Editor's Introduction. Clemens Brentano: Nachtwachen von Bonaventura. Heidelberg, Carl Winter, 1912. p. IX.

[43] Erich Frank, p. IX.

[44] Erich Frank, p. LXI.

relationship to the Church and to the belief it stands for. It becomes obvious that the Church is the well deserved victim of searing criticism and biting satire, but it becomes equally obvious that Kreuzgang cannot, as is perhaps the case with the idealized atheist, accept the 'Nichts' as a given, and peaceful, solution to his spiritual misery. The 'Nichts' remains, essentially, a negative and threatening conclusion, a meaningless purgatory that envelops life both in this world and in the hereafter. Exactly here, however, where a difference becomes obvious between Kreuzgang's and the atheist's version of the 'Nichts'. Kreuzgang remains tied to the intellectual superstructure of Christian idealism, while the atheist does not. The protagonist can no longer find comfort in and cling to the outdated doctrine of the Church, but he cannot imagine an existence completely outside of the framework on which Church dogma is based. As Erich Frank notes: "Das alles zeigt, wie die Phantasie des Verfassers ganz im katholischen Anschaungskreise lebt und sich ein Sein außerhalb der eigenen katholischen Kirche gar nicht vorstellen kann."[45] Kreuzgang seeks, and here his spiritual dilemma becomes a demonic journey into chaos, a means to replace the religion he has left behind with a new system, but his discoveries only reveal the 'Nichts'. As such, then, the 'Nichts' does not remain what it essentially is, namely

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[45] Erich Frank, p. LIX.

nothingness, but it takes on the qualities of religious absolutes and becomes, in itself, a religion without values, guidance or doctrine.

Part of the reason that this claim can be put forward is Kreuzgang's continual search for the role of God in the society he inhabits. If Kreuzgang could find spiritual comfort, could, in fact, find comfort of any kind in the 'Nichts', then there would be no reason for him to keep 'unmasking' all around him; he could simply settle down and wait, peacefully, for the inevitable. Kreuzgang, however, appears to keep looking for an alternative. He spends his time around buildings and sites which have religious connotations: "Eventually he [Kreuzgang] finds refuge in graveyards, old churches and monasteries."[46] He listens intently to the 'wahnsinniger Weltschöpfer' (NW IX), who depicts a God in danger of drowning in his own boredom; here the ideal of immortality has been realized, but the only consequence, even to God Himself, is unspeakable boredom. As 'God' states:

> Das geht bei mir selbst nicht an; denn da sie [the puppet 'man'] sich dort unten schon mehr als zuviel langweilt und sich oft vergeblich bemüht in der kurzen Sekunde ihrer Existenz die Zeit zu vertreiben, wie müßte sie sich bei mir in der Ewigkeit, vor der ich oft selbst erschrecke, langweilen! (IX, pp. 114-115)

Kreuzgang even, as the Judgement Day episode in NW VI depicts, tries himself to play God, but here he is soundly rebuked by

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[46] Rado Pribic, Acta Germanica, p. 25.

society, and comes no closer to discovering the intentions of God himself. If a God still exists, then he has fallen silent, and refuses to aid mankind in its newest and deadliest dilemma.

The question of God in the Nachtwachen has been taken up by more than one critic. Jeffrey Sammons, for example, postulates that the Nachtwachen display "a profound loss of faith in God". He concedes that "God still exists in the world as drawn by Bonaventura, but he is no longer to be loved, no longer to be trusted, no longer to be feared [...]", and he concludes that "if Creation displays His handiwork, one can only conclude from it that God is a pathetic bungler [...]."[47] Walter Hof also shares this opinion:

> Nicht die Gottheit schlechthin, sondern der "liebe Gott" ist es, der den Nihilisten verlorengeht, die Gestalt der guten, gerechten, letztlich human gedachten Gottheit.[48]

These opinions, however, are not conclusive, even if Jeffrey Sammons can claim that "Nowhere is the 'Creator' an object of satire [...]".[49] If God remains silent even when his existence is placed in doubt, then he is, even if he is not expressly denied in the Nachtwachen, as good as dead.

The quest for God comes to an end in the 'Nichts'. In the world of the Nachtwachen the possibility of the existence of

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47 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 69.

48 Walter Hof, p. 405.

49 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 69.

God has been fundamentally placed in doubt. If in this bizarre spectrum presented to the reader, the concept of 'God' remains alive, it is, for lack of a concrete theological theory, difficult to determine. It is clear, however, that Kreuzgang has, through his Christian heritage, been taught to think in terms of ideals and absolutes. The only absolute, however, is the yawning chasm presented by nihilism, which assumes the absolute and idealistic quality previously attached to the concept of God. Like God, the 'Nichts' appears all powerful and omnipotent.

> Mankind - so Bonaventura believes - gradually realizes it has been hearing not divine guidance, but its own words; the mind learns it feeds only on its own echo in meaningless isolation.[50]

What the reader witnesses in the character of Kreuzgang, then, is a pseudo-religion, whose focus is the nothingness which appears to lurk behind every 'mask' he encounters. "Er [Kreuzgang] stürzt in den Abgrund des Nichts, da sich ihm aus der Verzweiflung kein Absprung in den Glauben eröffnet."[51] A lateral transfer has taken place, in which Kreuzgang attempts to place the values and conventions of the tradition he is accustomed to onto a new framework which is essentially amoral and which has no structured system of values or beliefs.

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[50] Gerald Gillespie: "Romantic Oedipus." Goethezeit. Studien zur Erkenntnis und Rezeption Goethes und seiner Zeitgenossen. Festschrift für Stuart Atkins. Ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister. Bern, München: Francke, 1981. p. 341.

[51] Gerhart Hoffmeister, p. 54.

From this attempt, there results negative and frightening chaos, in which Kreuzgang is forced to attribute his frustration more to the realm of the Devil than to that of God. Where faith and belief break down, so organized religion teaches us, there is chaos, a chaos presided over by the forces of evil, which try to lead the believer astray. Kreuzgang's spiritual quagmire is essentially very modern in character, and his despair and anguish, symptoms of his inability to transcend the old order, prove that even while the devil himself may have become a casualty in the war for the soul of modern man, his spirit, incorporated in the disillusioning and fearful quality of the 'Nichts' survives, a sure sign that man's spiritual evolution lags far behind his intellectual progress.

3. Society

3.1 Society versus the Individual: A Demonic Conflict

In the Nachtwachen Kreuzgang is depicted as the quintessential individual, who is not understood and ostracized by the society of which he is a part. One of the most important sub-themes to the Nachtwachen, therefore, is the question of what the role of the 'gifted' individual is in society. In the Nachtwachen, society is represented as a bloated, inept, corrupt and generally insensitive monstrosity, stifling the individual through its weak, mechanical institutions and officials, as well as through its outdated, stagnant moral and intellectual ideology.

In several respects, then, one can talk of the 'demonic' aspects society presents in the novel. While it is true that "all men are governed by the existing ideologies and institutions of their times"[52], most individuals do not realize just how dependent they are on the society of which they are a product. Society is present not only in the form of the 'state', with its wide array of institutions, but is also represented in such concepts as 'family', 'friendship'

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52 Kathy Brzovic, p. 381.

or 'loyalty'. In short, society is present in the entire spectrum of building blocks that make up both the culture and civilization of which 'society' is the foundation. Society also serves as the basis for the identity of the individual. "People in society define themselves in relation to the established system. To strip the system away is to enter into the unknown. The death of society as we know it is just as threatening as death itself."[53] Society, therefore, acts as a mirror for the individual, and societies' norms form the basis for the 'collective' character of the individual. Consequently, aberrations from these norms define the unique nature of the individual character and personality. And yet the social ideology is a synthetic, man-made collection of values and ideas.

> Although we are born into, and consequently take for granted, such ideological systems and social institutions [church class state], they are not givens in the same sense as nature or human life is a given.[54]

From the start, the individual is trapped in a 'demonic' relationship to his society. It provides the ideological basis for his existence, but also forms the structure by which the individual is continually confronted in his quest for autonomy over his immediate environment. Such is the case in the Nachtwchen, where a distinctly unique character simply cannot

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[53] Kathy Brzovic, p. 390.

[54] Kathy Brzovic, p. 381.

be integrated into the society of which he is a part. "There are always certain individuals who cannot be fitted into the general scheme of things and must be relegated to a marginal position on the outskirts of society."[55] Kreuzgang, in the Nachtwachen, is a typical case in point. As an outsider, Kreuzgang exposes not only society, but also its weakened and often unjust underlying ideology. "Ein schwankendes, schwächliches Zeitalter entflammt seinen [Kreuzgangs] Zorn und seine Satire."[56]

Unfortunately for Kreuzgang, the protagonist is tragically doomed with regard to his position in society in two ways. As an outsider and indiviual, he can (and does) comment on the inadequacies he observes around him, but as he refuses to integrate himself into the societal unit, society isolates him further.

> If man dares to point out the cracks in the fabric of society, if he tries to manifest his own will, society will throw mountains over him under which he can only shake himself in fury, without harming the social structure.[57]

A demonic process is born, in which the 'cell', in this case the individual, becomes isolated from the 'body', namely society. While Kreuzgang would initially appear to suffer more

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55 Kathy Brzovic, p. 381.

56 Raimund Steinert: ed. Postscript. Nachtwachen von Bonaventura. Nach Rahel Varnhagens Exemplar. Kiepenhauers Liebhaberbibliothek. Vol. 19. Weimar: Kiepenhauer, 1914. p. 304.

57 Rado Pribic, Acta Germanica, p. 27.

on account of this separation than society, society also loses the ability to use constructively one of its most ingenious critics. By isolating Kreuzgang, society has also silenced him, and thus has become blind to its own flaws. While this may, in the short run, be a benefit to a regressive and close-minded society, it does, in the long run, make the changes which society will inevitably have to undergo so much more difficult to deal with. Kreuzgang, almost a Cassandra figure in the context of this novel, acts as a societal weather vane, and by ignoring him society can also ignore the symptoms of its own illness.

While this may be the case, in Kreuzgang the reader witnesses the demonic process of collision between society and individual in reverse. The protagonist feels himself continually stifled by society. Primarily through his intelligence, Kreuzgang unmasks society as an evil mediocrity, which, unconscious in its ignorance, crushes and oppresses all who refuse to conform with the accepted ideology. A lack of communication between society and individual ensues, and a process of alienation results, in which the protagonist is partly forced and partly ready to exile himself from what he judges to be a thoroughly restrictive society. "Kreuzgang is very much aware that intellect is responsible for his overly critical attitude as well as his unwillingness to make a

commitment, which entails a lack of communication."[58] This process becomes 'demonic' in that it takes on a self-alienating characteristic, in which the 'gifted' individual, in this case Kreuzgang, helps to ostracize himself. "Im mechanischen Staatsgebilde ist der außerordentliche Mensch sich selbst entfremdet [...]."[59] Complications ensue as the alienation inherent in the above mentioned process is an essential component required for the artistic process utilized by Kreuzgang in the writing of his 'Nachtwachen', (See Chapter 4 for more detail) as both criticism and parody of society would be impossible without the artistic distance necessitated insofar as that the artist, in respect to society, becomes an introverted pariah.

The result of Kreuzgang's alienation from society, however, is that his own personality and sense of identity also become 'victims'. Kreuzgang ceases to be able to give a definition to his own personality if he criticizes, parodies and finally negates the society of which he himself is a product. While man can be an island after all, as Kreuzgang proves, he cannot, and this is where he oversteps himself, exist in a vacuum. If the collective foundations that make up society are categorically exposed as shams, and are revealed to be masks concealing the 'Nichts', then the logical question

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58 Rado Pribic, Acta Germanica, p. 24.

59 Gerhart Hoffmeister, p. 207.

to ask is what is concealed behind the mask of Kreuzgang's own character. 'Nichts' seems to be the most probable answer.

Kreuzgang's personality reflects his individuality, and this sense of uniqueness and identity is based on the manner in which the variables that make up the indivudual 'Kreuzgang' reflect corresponding societal norms. If Kreuzgang were simply to correlate the information regarding his own personality as well as that of his society and conclude that the two were incompatible, then the reader would be confronted by an 'outsider' in the traditional sense. Kreuzgang goes one step further, however, in that he negates and destroys the ideological components that make up his society, annihilating in the process not only the conventicnal and collective socia identity, but his own identity as well. Kreuzgang's confrontation with the 'Nichts' becomes the natural, albeit thoroughly demonic consequence of the process through which the individual, having been ostracized and negated by society, ostracizes and negates society in return. By doing so, the individual in question is almost tragically forced to deal with the negation of his own individuality, a negation that disguises itself behind the mask of the 'Nichts'. "At the end, Kreuzgang's inner alienation from society is absolute. [...] He turns into a passive spectator who refuses to assume responsibility for the events around him."[60]

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[60] Rado Pribic, Acta Germanica, p. 28.

Most unfortunately, the process which alienates Kreuzgang from society also exiles him from his fellow man. As Kreuzgang finds himself pushed more and more to the outskirts of society, he tends to associate with other outsiders, like the Poet or the Marionettendirektor, who serve as reflections, to some degree, of his own character. While necessity has forced him to become aware of his own individuality, he has compensated by becoming increasingly aware of the herd-like characteristics of the other members of society, who, to him, epitomize a general lack of consciousness.

> The feeling of otherness brings along another type of alienation, namely the separation from his fellow man. Kreuzgang gradually detects that he is surrounded by people who are stupid and vain, have no inventiveness and resemble one another like sheep in a flock.[61]

Slowly but surely, the night-watchman ceases to communicate with mankind, whose collective character begins to resemble the living dead. The result, as the novel progresses, is an undeniable sense of introspective misanthropy. As Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey recognizes:

> Die Zeitkritik [in den Nachtwachen] richtet sich nicht gegen die breite Masse stumpfsinniger Bürger, sondern gegen Staats- und Gesellschaftseinrichtungen einerseits und dann - aber das ist weniger Zeit- als Weltkritik und mehr Verachtung als Kritik - gegen die Menschen überhaupt.[62]

The results of the 'demonic' process of what is not only, in

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61 Rado Pribic, Acta Germanica, p. 26.

62 Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 42.

the end, destructive self-alienation on the parts of both society and the individual, but mutual self-disintegration, is an equally 'demonic' sense of pessimistic misanthropy. "Kreuzgang fährt wie der Teufel unter die Menschen und schleudert das Feuer seines Zornes gegen die Welt und Gott."[63]

3.2 The Annihilation of Society in the "Nachtwachen"

One of the most severely criticized of all social institutions in the Nachtwachen is the judicial branch of the state. If the spiritual plane of man's existence is controlled through the Church, then the physical well-being of the individual is decided by the courts. The two institutions, the Church and the Courts, become, therefore, two sides of the same coin. As such, the judicial arm of the state is exposed in much the same manner as the Church. While not obviously corrupt, the officials of the Courts, in this case the judges, are symbols for the uncaring, sober and mechanical approach to justice which defines society. "The priests are accused of stupefying people, the jurists are presented as brainless officials."[64]

The judge in the third Night-watch presents the reader with a good example. Kreuzgang becomes aware of this

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[63] Gerhart Hoffmeister, p. 204.

[64] Rado Pribic, Slawische Beiträge, p. 105.

"mechanische Todesmaschine" (III, p. 31) through the judge's wife, who cheats on her husband. The judge, unaware of the 'crime' taking place in his own home, is busy with his work, and is 'dispensing justice' before going to sleep. "Das Wesen schrieb, in Aktenstöße vergraben, wie ein lebendig eingescharrter Lapländer" (III, p. 31). The judge displays so little in the way of individuality, that Kreuzgang does not even label him as a person. Rado Pribic postulates that the Nachtwachen attempts to show that "among its citizens, society prefers good, useful machines to bold spirits"[65], and the judge is, in this scenario, a case in point. He is simply the "Wesen", a living machine which performs a mechanical action in the name of a lifeless but extremely dangerous ideology.

In the figure of the judge, the reader is introduced for the first time to what is one of Bonaventura's most important motifs, namely the marionette. Reappearing in many different places, and serving many different functions, this motif serves as an especially malignant example of the cold and wooden manner in which the individual conforms to society. Society, Bonaventura stresses, is not interested in the individual, merely in the marionette, which fulfills a specific function for a specific reason. In signing the death sentences, the judge becomes a marionette who, without any

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[65] Rado Pribic, Slawische Beiträge, p. 96.

sign of conscious thought decides the fate of three, ironically nameless, individuals.

> [...] und die Marionette saß, leblos aufgerichtet, in dem Aktensarge voll Bücherwürmer. Jezt wurde der unsichtbare Drath gezogen, da klapperten die Finger, ergriffen die Feder und unterzeichneten drei Papiere nach einander; ich blickte schärfer hin - es waren Todesurtheile. (III, p. 31)

Kreuzgang sympathizes with the three doomed individuals, but concludes that he would rather be in their position than in that of the lifeless judge. "Beim Himmel", he claims, "hätte ich die Wahl zwischen beiden, lieber wäre ich der lebende Sünder, als dieser todte Gerechte" (III, p. 31).

While this episode is, up to this point, disillusioning and callous, it takes on much more serious implications when the reader learns that this hollow figure does have a personal motive that emerges from behind the facade of mechanically impartial justice. The judge is not only a mindless marionette, but also has a cruel alter-ego which, in the shape of the judge's own personality, displays a cruel and malicious psyche. Perhaps as a warning to his wife to beware of infidelity or, as a genuine sign of his affection for her, the judge has arranged for the executions to take place on her birthday. "Ich dachte Ihnen", the judge states to his wife, "eine Freude damit zu machen, weil in den Büchern die Sie lesen, so viele ums Leben kommen. Deshalb habe ich auch, um Sie zu überraschen, die Hinrichtungen an Ihrem Geburtstage festgesezt!" (III, p. 32). Kreuzgang, disgusted with both the

judge and his wife, decides to retaliate and resolves to subject the judge's wife to the judge's own process of justice:

> Ich beschloß in dem Augenblicke teuflisch genug, ihm noch, wo möglich, diese Nacht seine Frau in die hochnothpeinliche Halsgerichtsordnung auszuliefern, damit er Macht über sie erhielte. (III, p. 32)

Kreuzgang himself, the reader later learns, also had the misfortune to collide with society, and this collision also resulted in a clash with the Courts. Kreuzgang, in his role as a writer, was tolerated by society as long as he produced what society found acceptable. Tolerable, he found, were stories that satiated society's lust for blood.

> Blut lieben sie [die Menschen] über die Maaßen, und wenn sie es auch nicht selbst vergießen, so mögen sie es doch für ihr Leben überall in Bildern, Gedichten und im Leben selbst gern fließen sehen; in großen Schlachtstücken am liebsten. Ich sang ihnen daher Mordgeschichten und hatte mein Auskommen dabei [...]. (VII, p. 91)

What becomes obvious, in these stories, is that society is not only ignorant and bloodthirsty, but also cruel and, in itself, presents a contrast with the 'ideals' of culture and the bloody reality that serves as its basis. As Rado Pribic writes:

> Civilization has not made man better, it only created a greater variety of sensation and taught him how to slaughter on a larger scale. Man's viciousness has almost no limits.[66]

Soon, however, Kreuzgang intensifies his writing, and

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[66] Rado Pribic, Acta Germanica, p. 26.

begins to comment on subjects which society finds unacceptable. He begins to make public his opinions on Church and State (VII, p. 91), and these opinions cause him to be faced with numerous legal suits: "[...] es wurden in kurzen mehr denn funfzig [sic] Injurienprozesse gegen mich anhängig gemacht" (VII, p. 91).

Kreuzgang defends himself, and makes a farce of his case in front of the "Gerechtigkeitsmasken" (VII, p. 91). He uses the Courtroom as his own personal arena, and, in veiled form, presents the judges with the argument that they cannot be effective judges as they do not understand the 'crimes' that they are sitting in judgement over. "Nun aber", he counsels, "wäre es nicht übel gerathen, daß Sie selbst nicht nur als Theoretiker die Verbrechen kennen lernten, sondern sie auch als brave Praktiker auszuüben verständen [...]" (VII, p. 92). Kreuzgang's dialectic is, in effect, saying that the judges are not entitled to sit in judgement over 'life', as they themselves do not 'live'. They are puppets mechanically serving an abstract system.

Kreuzgang concludes his argument by raising the point that he has only morally offended society, and that the institution which governs the moral trespasses in society should not be the Courts, but the Church. He notes that even legal scholars have differentiated between the laws and society's moral code and concludes: "daß die Gerechtigkeit schlechterdings nichts mit der Moralität zu schaffen habe"

(VII, p. 94). As he has offended society only through his writing, he cannot have caused 'physical' injury to society, and thus could not possibly be tried before a court of secular law. He classifies himself (and this is a point to be discussed in Chapter 6) as a "moralische Person", and claims that as such he can be condemned only by a court dealing with spiritual matters, that he stands "unter dem foro privilegiato einer anderen Welt" (VII, p. 94). What other spiritual and moral world Kreuzgang claims to be a member of, he carefully and discreetly 'forgets' to mention.

While Kreuzgang's arguments are unusual, they are persuasive. Kreuzgang has acted as "advocatus diaboli" (VII, p. 91), and his behaviour as such can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, Kreuzgang has literally acted as the devil's advocate, not only for himself, but for all individuals accused by society. He has clearly shown the ideal of justice to be theoretical and inconsistent. Secondly, however, Kreuzgang, in his role as the devil's advocate, has attempted to discredit himself so that the judges, and the entire mechanical apparatus associated with the judicial arm of the state, should condemn him. In this condemnation, Kreuzgang would be able to expose the state as an institution incapable of dealing with criticism, and would make himself a martyr to what he, Kreuzgang, perceives as the truth.

Unfortunately, however, the state does not even grant the narrator this minor victory. Rather than condemn him, and thus

recognize his individuality, the judges regard Kreuzgang as "mente captis" (VII, p. 95), and deliver him into the custody of the mental asylum. Kreuzgang's attempt to force a confrontation between him and society has failed. Society, rather than dealing with the individual, simply separates and ostracizes him, and the judges' decision simply proves that society is not capable of dealing with significantly different interpretations of its own ideology. In fact, any aberration from the accepted narrow-minded norms must necessarily be judged as insanity. Any point of view which has, as its fulcrum, a position outside of the accepted conventions of society presupposes incomprehensible and, to society, potentially dangerous intellectualism. This is best written off as madness. There is, as Judith Pond concludes, "no freedom for the individual within a rigidly organized society [...]."[67]

The mad-house to which Kreuzgang has now been confined serves as a microcosm of outsiders who, like Kreuzgang, cannot find acceptance in the larger macrocosm of the world. As the reader learns in the ninth night watch, there are relatively few, if any, truly 'insane' individuals in the asylum. The collection of outcasts provides Kreuzgang with the perfect opportunity to criticise society: "Humanitär - individualistische Kritik am Staat findet sich besonders in

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[67] Judith Pond, p. 63.

der Tollhausszene."[68] The occupants include, for example, No. 4, who has been locked up because his thinking is simply too far advanced for his Age, "er [ist] in der Bildung um ein halbes Jahrhundert zu weit vorausgeschritten" (IX, p. 112), as well as No. 5, whose grasp of common sense was too much for the censors to bear: "No. .5 hielt zu verständige und verständliche Reden, deshalb haben sie ihn hierher geschickt" (IX, p. 112).

The mad-house provides Kreuzgang with the opportunity to confront 'rationality', one of society's virtues, with the 'irrationality' of the 'lunatics'. Of course, this scenario allows Kreuzgang to reverse the two values. Kreuzgang presents the asylum as a warped, but stable model of tranquility, and unmasks the world beyond the asylum walls as irrational and dangerous. Doktor Öhlmann, the institute's medical supervisor, poses as no match for Kreuzgang. "Der Patient", so Franz Loquai, "fühlt sich dem Arzt überlegen".[69] This idea is reinforced by the advice proffered by the dubious physician. "Der Doktor Öhlmann verordnete mir nach einigem Nachsinnen viele Bewegung und wenig oder gar kein Denken [...]" (IX, p. 120). Öhlmann, it seems, believes the root cause of Kreuzgang's 'madness' is the result of the fact that he thinks

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68 Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 43.

69 Franz Loquai: "Der Nachtwächter im Irrenhaus. Zum Thema des Wahnsinns in den Nachtwachen von Bonaventura." Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur 12 (1987), p. 144.

too much. Again, in the context of the Nachtwachen this is a statement that can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the doctor is not altogether wrong: the thoughts which form the foundations for Kreuzgang's intellectual superstructure do not conform with those of society, and the resulting clash has resulted in Kreuzgang's ostracism. If the protagonist were to give up thinking, then he could much more easily be forced to conform to the norms that he has abandoned. On the other hand, the doctor's advice echoes that of the judges. They have 'banished' him, while the physician seeks to reintegrate his former patient by reversing the banishment. If Kreuzgang were to conform by giving up thinking, a return to society would not be completely unthinkable. Kreuzgang's comment "Ich ließ ihn gehen!" (IX, p. 120) is proof not only that Kreuzgang refuses to accept this advice, but also proves that the doctor has underestimated a patient that he does not understand. Kreuzgang cannot simply give up thinking, just as he cannot give up living. Unless Kreuzgang is willing to make major concessions, his way back into society appears hopelessly blocked.

In the fourteenth night watch, the issue of rationality versus irrationality is brought into even sharper focus. Before his relationship with Ophelia, Kreuzgang appears ready to abandon his attempts at integrating himself with society. "[Ich] war", he reports, fast auf dem glücklichen Wege, mich

wahrhaft zur Tollheit, als dem einzigen haltbaren Systeme, zu bekennen [...]" (XIV, p. 157). His frame of mind is such that he wishes to revenge himself on society by founding a new and 'irrational' doctrine to counteract the supposed 'rationality' of society. He finds himself tempted by "[...] dem heftigen Bestreben zur Errichtung einer Narrenpropaganda und einer ausgebreiteten Kolonie von Verrückten, um sie zum Schrecken der andern vernünftigen Menschen plötzlich anlanden zu lassen" (XIV, p. 159). At this point, Kreuzgang, while frustrated, stands between society and the world of the madmen. He has been cast out from society, but he cannot find refuge in 'insanity'. He is accepted by neither order, a fact that is reinforced by the fact that society, while ostracising him, still finds him 'rational' enough to entrust to him a position of leadership in the asylum. He is made a "Vize- und Unteraufseher" (IX, p. 110), a position that traps him between both 'societies', but does not allow him to be integrated into either one.

Ophelia, in contrast to Kreuzgang, is no longer a part of 'society'. She has lost her ability to distinguish between her artistic role and her role in society as an actress. As such, she has effectively relinquished her role in society and become a member of the alternate society which has captivated Kreuzgang's interest. His 'fusion' with Ophelia is his attempt to integrate himself into the society of the asylum.

> Und Kreuzgang, der sich als Insasse des Tollhauses gegenüber Hamlets fingiertem Wahnsinn als 'wirklich

> toll' bezeichnet, betrachtet sich nur für toll in den Augen der von ihm gehaßten scheinhaften Welt der Vernünftigen.[70]

He counsels Ophelia, whose genuine confusion at her predicament have made her truly 'mad' no longer to give thought to the question of 'role'. He has concluded that everything is a meaningless role, and only in the asylum are the adopted 'roles' no longer taken seriously.

> Grübele dergleichen Dingen nicht so tief nach, Theure, denn sie sind so verworrener Natur, daß sie leicht zum Tollhause führen könnten! Es ist Alles Rolle, die Rolle selbst und der Schauspieler, der darin steckt, und in ihm wieder seine Gedanken und Plane und Begeisterungen und Possen - alles gehört dem Momente an, und entflieht rasch, wie das Wort, von den Lippen des Komödianten. (XIV, p. 165)

In response to Ophelia, Kreuzgang has himself adopted a role, namely that of Hamlet. Unlike Ophelia, however, Kreuzgang does not succeed in making the breakthrough that Ophelia has made. The "Durchbruch" into Ophelia's world, which would eliminate his dependence on society, thus eludes him: Kreuzgang's relationship takes on the form of a literary fantasy (see Chapter 4) and, because Kreuzgang is unable to emerge completely into the world of the asylum, this attempt is also doomed to symbolic failure. The child, the symbol between the union that could see Kreuzgang integrated into the world of the insane, dies. Kreuzgang's attempt "mit den Narren

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[70] Klaus Bartenschlager: "Bonaventuras Shakespeare. Zur Bedeutung Shakespeares für die Nachtwachen." Großbritannien und Deutschland. Europäische Aspekte der politisch-kulturellen Beziehungen beider Länder in Geschichte und Gegenwart. München, Goldmann, 1974. p. 356.

um mich her Plato's Republick zu realisiren" (XIV, p. 167) fails, and Kreuzgang's attempt to integrate himself into the society of the 'rational' has also failed, as has his attempt to create an alternate society in which he can integrate himself. At the end of this night watch, he accepts his position as an outsider, and gives in, completely, to the misanthropy which has been brooding in him for so long.

> The essential issues of this passage [NW XIV] - Kreuzgang's life-affirming love and the crushing effect of the deaths [of Ophelia and the child] - lead us to the ultimate question debated by Bonaventura through the voice of his narrator: the value of the individual struggle in the face of senseless circumstance.[71]

Almost as an epilogue to the scenario in the asylum, Kreuzgang finds himself banished from his 'home', the only place in which he has found any acceptance. He returns to society, but this time has no plans of asserting himself against the mechanical apparatus which has defeated him yet again. In conclusion, he bitterly notes that his former cynicism has now become full-blown hatred: "[...] denn ich hatte aus dem Tollhause einen verstärkten Haß gegen alle Vernünftige mitgebracht [...]." (XV, p. 171) From now on Kreuzgang reacts, with regard to society, as a passive outsider, who reports on what he sees, but who longer attempts to confront actively the 'catastrophe' of human existence by which he finds himself surrounded: "At the end," Rado Pribic

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[71] Ellis Finger. "Bonaventura through Kreuzgang: Nachtwachen as Autobiography." German Quarterly 53 (1980), p. 291.

writes, "Kreuzgang's inner alienation from society is absolute. [...] He turns into a passive spectator who refuses to assume responsibility for the events around him."[72]

Yet even an unwilling Kreuzgang is forced to confront society again. The fifteenth night watch details how the protagonist, after being expelled from the asylum, cannot avoid contact either with his fellow man or with the governing body of the state, under whose 'omnipotent' shield Kreuzgang unfortunately falls. Kreuzgang accepts a position as a puppeteer, and the reaction of the crowd to the staged show forces the individual, already hiding behind the guise of his puppet, in this case the beloved Hanswurst, back onto center stage and into the limelight. The ensuing confrontation has a distinct political foundation, and Kreuzgang, who has already cloaked himself in anonymity in order to avoid dealing with society, is forced to act politically, an impossible task for a character who has attempted to distance himself as much as possible from the society he despises.

The fact that Kreuzgang does not take seriously the political events of his day becomes obvious from the very start. The French Revolution, whose implications could still be felt in the figure of Napoleon during Bonaventura's time, and which doubtlessly stands as the most important political upheaval of the century, is denegrated to the role of a puppet

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[72] Rado Pribic, Acta Germanica, p. 28.

play on the stage of world history, and is portrayed as an entertaining fad of little consequence. "Sie gaben druben grade die große Tragikomödie, in der ein König unglücklich debütirte, und der Hanswurst, als Freiheit und Gleichheit, lustig Menschenköpfe, statt der Schellen, schuttelte" (XV, p. 177). Even the ideals of the Revolution - Freedom, Equality and Brotherhood, seem to have little effect on the Night-watchman. In this sentiment, the narrator is not alone, and his disdain for the Revolution reflects the attitude of many who were disillusioned by the early promise of the Revolution, the progress of which seemed more than reversed by the ensuing bloodbath and the rise of Napoleon.

> The French Revolution of 1789 did not nearly satisfy man's hopes and expectations. [...] Instead of leading man toward the ideal state of liberty, equality, and fraternity, the Revolution unleashed man's cruelty, viciousness, his desire for power, and revealed an alarming lack of mutual understanding.[73]

Unfortunately, Kreuzgang's puppet play echoes the sequence of political evemts across the French border. The reaction to the play unleashes panic and chaos among the audience, and almost results in a pathetic revolution of its own. "Wir hatten", Kreuzgang reports, "den unglucklichen Einfall den Holofernes auf das Theater zu bringen, und erhizten dadurch die zuschauenden Bauern so heftig, daß sie die Bühne erstürmten [...]" (XV, p. 177). The argument that

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[73] Rado Pribic, Acta Germanica, p. 23.

the Nachtwachen display "durchaus eine revolutionsfreundliche Neigung [...]"[74] seems, mainly due to Kreuzgang's pessimistic attitude towards the existing societal norms, at first glance to be substantiated by the text, but the protagonist's response makes this line of approach towards the political position of the novel questionable. Kreuzgang proceeds to rein in the rampaging peasants by holding a speech, and prevents the bloodbath before it gets started. Not only is Kreuzgang's own political position obscured by this speech, but perhaps more importantly, the narrator's ability to direct the crowd to do his bidding and turn their emotions on and off with so little effort sends a clear signal to the reader that the 'public' responsible for the upheavals of the revolution are just as much automatons as the men who lead them, and their actions have, as a result, little impact on the general state of the world.

> Aus ihrem Alltagstrott zu mörderischem Aktionismus aufgestachelt, werden sie [die Bauern] durch ein paar Worte ebensoschnell wieder zu 'gutmütigen Lämmern, die ihren Unterdrücker hochleben lassen. Damit erweisen sie sich erst recht als Automaten [...].[75]

While in general, therefore, Kreuzgang does tend to sympathize with the poor and oppressed of society, he does hold them, as

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[74] Walter Hinderer: "'Dieses Schwanzstück der Schöpfung': Büchners Dantons Tod und die Nachtwachen des Bonaventura." Georg Büchner Jahrbuch 2 (1982), p. 336.

[75] Walter Pfannkuche: Idealismus und Nihilismus in den "Nachtwachen" von Bonaventura. Frankfurt, Lang, 1983. p. 23.

the satire in this episode demonstrates, partly responsible for their own lot. One can concur with Walter Pfannkuche who, commenting on Kreuzgang's political status, notes: "[...] als Revolutionär ist der Mann [Kreuzgang] ein Versager."[76]

What is important in this episode, then, is not, as some critics believe[77], the narrator's stand on the political events of his day, but rather how impossible it is for the outsider to exist without coming into conflict with society on some level. Like Hanswurst, who is also a tragi-comic outsider, the protagonist cannot exist as an autonomous individual outside of the boundaries of society. Hanswurst is confiscated (XV, p. 182), and thus becomes forcibly integrated into society, in the process losing his 'freedom'. It is no accident that Kreuzgang also integrates himself into the existing social structure at precisely this point. Kreuzgang realizes that he cannot escape the tangled spider web of society, and thus integrates himself as much as is necessary to survive. His comment "der Mensch ist nicht Kosmopolit allein, er ist auch Staatsbürger" (XV, p. 182) must be viewed in this light. While undoubtably satirical, there is a touch of sadness in Kreuzgang's decision. Satirical or not, however, Kreuzgang is, first and foremost, a survivor, and he realizes, as many of the other figures in the novel do not (ie.

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[76] Walter Pfannkuche, p. 22.

[77] Walter Hinderer, p. 336.

Marionettendirektor, Poet), that he cannnot avoid society, but must cloak himself, even to a limited degree, in the mantle of respectability if he is to retain even a vestige of freedom. The post of night-watchman is thus suited perfectly for Kreuzgang. He remains more or less anonymous, and does not have to conform to the norms of the 'daylight' world, and, at the same time, he can observe, report and criticize the world around him.

While Kreuzgang does parody and expose both the concept of society and the members who make up this mediocre society, he is nonetheless forced to compromise. In this necessity to compromise lies the essence of the underlying demonic impulse inherent to the society of the Nachtwachen. Doubtlessly, the society of the Nachtwachen is not a realistic portrayal of society, nor should it be. The reader is exposed to society from the point of view of an outsider, and to this individual society represents a mechanical, unjust and uncaring system, which continually threatens to envelop him. The criticism that society in the Nachtwachen is fabricated is, therefore, justified: "In den Nachtwachen wird Gesellschaft nicht dargestellt, sondern hergestellt."[78] Important, however, is the fact that no matter what surrealistic configuration society adopts in the novel, the individual cannot develop himself independently of the social order.

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[78] Peter Kohl, p. 95.

> Kreuzgang's actions form a repetitive pattern: no matter what position he has, he will attack the social order sooner or later; however, his attacks are invariably ineffective and he suffers for his attempt. The punishment is usually some form of ostracism, which he begins to accept, rather than oppose, at an early date and develop into a desire for isolation.[79]

Society, therefore, is not, like the Church or the Christian doctrine, inherently 'demonic'. If anything, society is represented as a featureless, unsympathetic and all powerful monolith, that mercilessly crushes any attempt at self-autonomy for the individual. It is in the interfacing between individual and society, then, that demonic characteristics come into play. The gifted individual is continually locked into a confrontation course with a mediocre social order, whose powerful norms he cannot escape. In the end, society is revealed to be a sham - an incompetent system - which, on the one hand, exerts irrevocable control over the individual, but which, on the other hand, when obliterated also obliterates the basis for the identity of the individual. "Die Individualität entpuppt sich als Täuschung [...]".[80]

A self-destructive cycle, unveiling the negative hopelessness characteristic of the Nachtwachen, becomes apparent, in which the outsider, dependent on the social order in which he is entangled, becomes increasingly aware of his

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[79] Norman Brown: Critical Studies of Bonaventura's "Nachtwachen". Diss., Stanford, 1971. p. 105.

[80] Walter Hinderer, p. 341.

uniqueness, and becomes increasingly dependent on his own individuality. "As the watchman, he [Kreuzgang] turns away from society and attempts to find his identity within himself."[81] Having discarded society as a useless and hostile husk to his existence, however, Kreuzgang is faced with the fact that his own identity, solidly based on its opposition to his own society, is also hollow and meaningless. It is here that the demonic characteristic inherent to the interaction between society and individual presents itself in full force: by confronting and negating society, Kreuzgang has ruined himself.

Still, in conclusion, the question must be addressed of whether or not the novel, through Kreuzgang's failure to accomodate himself, is attempting to invoke changes to its own society. At present a destructive, demonic relationship exists between society and its most gifted individuals, but must this always necessarily be the case? For the most part, the critics seem to indicate that social change for the better is a continuing hope of the 'anonymous' author. Franz Loquai, for example, postulates:

> Bei Bonaventura behält die Umkehrung des normalen gesellschaftlichen Ordnungsgefüges ins Chaos den Status einer Übergangsstufe auf dem Weg zu einer neuen Harmonie, die auch bei ihm als utopische Alternative aufscheint [...].[82]

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[81] Norman Brown, p. 126.

[82] Franz Loquai, p. 153.

Gerhart Hoffmeister also comes to this conclusion:

> Und doch stellt diese radikale Verneinung auch sich selbst in Frage; in der Vehemenz der Anklage, der Abstrafung der Laster und der Anprangerung der falschen Welt läßt sich die Hoffnung Bonaventuras auf eine Besserung der Zustände nicht überhören, wenn sein Protagonist auch am Ende verzweifelt.[83]

Both of these ideas, however, are not borne out by the events portrayed in the novel. Doubtlessly, Kreuzgang hopes for a better and more 'convenient' world, but the fashion in which he unmasks his society indicates that the values, such as justice, which form the basis for society as a concept are hollow shells. If these values were replaced, even in a positive sense, one set of masks would simply be replaced by another. The foundation, the 'Nichts', would remain constant, and the demonic conundrum in which Kreuzgang finds himself would remain the same. "Gewiß", writes Richard Brinkmann, "steht hinter dem zerstörerischen Zynismus dieses Buches die Sehnsucht nach einer neuen und anderen Welt jenseits dieser schlechten und verlarvten."[84] The key to Kreuzgang's dilemma is that any hope of a better world remains a romantic yearning, which is not about to be fullfilled. A direct similarity thus becomes apparent between Kreuzgang's unspoken yearning for a better world and his unconscious desire for spiritual satisfaction. Both idealistic notions, however, are decisively terminated by the 'Nichts' at the end of the novel.

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[83] Gerhart Hoffmeister, p. 204.

[84] Richard Brinkmann: "Nachtwachen" von Bonaventura. Kehrseite der Frühromantik? Pfullingen, Neske, 1966. p. 25.

4. Art and Literature

4.1 Art and Artist: The Demonic Equation

If one theme more than any other occupies both Boanventura, and consequently his protagonist Kreuzgang, then that theme is generally art, and specifically literature. As such, then, the Nachtwachen are devoted as much to the art of storytelling as to the story itself, and the work is rich in literary allusions, themes, and critiques. "Es ist keine Übertreibung", so Klaus Bartenschlager, "die "Nachtwachen" eine literarische Echogalerie zu nennen, in der literarische Anspielungen und Anklänge - mit oder ohne Quellenangabe - nur so herumschwirren."[85] Kreuzgang himself, it must be remembered, is also an artist, and his 'memoirs', in the shape of a novel, are, after all, a work of art. In short, the Nachtwachen represent a collage of fragmented images and episodes, whose self-reflexive character places it far ahead of most of the literary theories of its time. While some theories, especially in the Romantic period, begin to adopt the disjointed plot structure which characterizes the Nachtwachen, none go as far as this work, which denounces art as a whole, and afterwards

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[85] Klaus Bartenschlager, p. 349.

rejects itself. "(...) Wer jezt leben will, der darf nicht dichten!" (I, p. 10), Kreuzgang advises the poet.[86]

The resulting 'demonic' process of self-destruction integrates the subject of art and artist into the despairing atmosphere prevalent throughout the novel. While an analysis as to the extent of the literary presence of other authors and ideas, as well as the novel's self-reflexive character, essentially falls outside the scope of this work, the principal thrust of the Nachtwachen is to "uncover" ideas, which in turn reflect conditions and situations both in society and the individual. As many of these ideas, conditions and situations deal with the "night"-side of human existence, it becomes essential to investigate at least some of the ideas regarding art and artist put forth in the text in conjunction with this work.

"Die Welt der Ideen", writes Walter Brocker, "nun dient uns als Maßstab der Erkenntnis und Beurteiling der sinnlichen Welt."[87] This view seems to describe in exact terms Kreuzgang's self-appointed task: to harness ideas in order to make sense of the chaotic mess through which he bumbles. The vehicle used by the protagonist to utilize these ideas is art, and this very process brings him into contact not with the "sinnliche

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[86] The word 'leben' can refer to two things, meaning both physical as well as spiritual existence. Those who wish to survive, either physically or spiritually, should refrain from art and poetry.

[87] Walter Brocker, p. 164.

Welt", but the "übersinnliche Welt." As Bröcker concludes, "Die übersinnliche Welt ist die Welt der Ideen."[88] This, the world of ideas, doubtlessly fascinates the night watchman, who claims: "Da fliegt der Geist von Pole zu Pole (...)" (II, p. 17). Kreuzgang here exposes himself as two things, firstly, as a narrator who has the tendency to go to extremes, but also as a figure whose existential realm is the realm of ideas, which manifests itself in art. "(...) Art is not a copy of nature but the manifestation of an idea, the unity of the finite material with the infinite human mind and spirit."[89] Sölle-Nipperdey takes this thought one step further, and postulates that in the work art represents a microcosm for life itself, and that the artist's problems depict, on a smaller scale, the problems presented in life as a whole, and that in the "Kunstkammer 'Leben'" there exists a reflection of art in life: "eine kleine (Kammer) für die Kunst".[90]

If one accepts this reasoning regarding the role of art in the Nachtwachen, then art becomes not only a theme or a subject in the work, it becomes an existential question, and he who attempts to grapple with the question of art, like the night-watchman, must consequently also grapple with the phenomenon of existence. Art necessarily becomes, for the

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88 Walter Bröcker, p. 164.

89 Rado Pribic, Slawische Beiträge, p. 81.

90 Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 71.

artist, a demonic pursuit, as the artist must continually be confronted by questions he cannot hope to answer, but whose answers he nonetheless seeks, even if, to do so, he must enlist the aid of a 'darker' power. The questions dealt with by the artist deal with "Unsterblichkeit" (I, p. 11) and "Ideale" (VIII, p. 96), and, as these in no way deal with the plebeian reality of existence, and as the intellectual answers to the questions the artist seeks are simply not available, the artist is continually confronted by chaos and the 'Nichts'.

While Kreuzgang appears to parody the artist figures he encounters in the work, and almost every figure in the novel is, in some way an "artist" figure, he himself is the work's premier artist, and as such it is he who is confronted in the harshest manner by his own parody. "Indeed, throughout Die Nachtwachen, one figure after another - from the tragic city poet down to the idle poetaster and actor - seeks vainly to capture events, emotions, insights, and situations in language".[91] The key word in this passage is "seeks", for although all try, they are all denied success in their various attempts, and hence the frustration that dominates the work. Structurally, this inability to express even limited ideas is manifested in the 'demonic' disorder of the novel; not one

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[91] Gerald Gillespie: "'Night-Piece and Tail-Piece.' Bonaventura's Relation to Hogarth." Arcadia. Zeitschrift für vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft 8 (1973): p. 291.

form of story-telling suffices to transmit the ideas in question to the reading public. Unfortunately, the resulting fragmentation has often been misunderstood in the secondary literature as inability on the part of the author. Erich Frank, for example, writes: "Ohne Plan und Ordnung sind die Gedanken hingeworfen, und die Gestalten folgen einander, wie sie sich gerade in dem Geiste des Dichters aufdrängen."[92]

This chaotic disorder, which reverses conventional artistic norms, seems at once, in its rebellion, extremely modern, but in its often baroque, even gothic, wording and ideas, a bizarre mixture between the Middle Ages and the present. The 'progress' of the Aufklärung, in content as well as form, is turned on its head. One of the key points to the novel, however, is that the progress manifested in the Enlightenment is merely showmanship: man, through rationality, has become yet more estranged from his roots than ever before. Man has replaced God with himself, but has lost the ability to comfort himself, as rationality and science focus not on mankind, but on a series of unsympathetic and unforgiving laws and rules. As the mad creator suggests in the ninth night watch: "zulezt - und das war das ärgste - dünkte sich das Stäubchen (mankind) selbst Gott und bauete Systeme auf, worin es sich bewunderte." (IX, p. 114)

As Walter Hof comments: "Die Aufklärung fühlt sich

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[92] Erich Frank, p. VIII.

zunächst natürlich dem finsteren Mittelalter gewaltig überlegen."[93] To Kreuzgang, however, the results of the Aufklärung are nothing short of yet another of the elusive "Hülsen", and the progress brought about by the Enlightenment is nothing short of a sham. "Die Menschheit", he postulates, "organisirt sich gerade nach Art einer Zwiebel, und schiebt immer eine Hülse in die andere bis zur kleinsten, worin der Mensch selbst denn ganz winzig stekt." (IX, p. 109)

Neither man, nor therefore art, for which man is the focal point, retain a place of central importance in the universe. Hence, the characters in the night-watches who display artistic notions, seem strangely out of place and 'romantic.' The artist has become alienated from his environment, and has become a unit unto himself. Estrangement has let the artist become absolute in his own sphere, but has cost him integration with society, nature and, in short, with life itself.

With Bonaventura this estrangement, and the demonic relationship between artist and society, and ideal and reality reaches new heights. The best example of this relationship is the 'Dachstuben' poet, who serves as Kreuzgang's alter ego from the first to the eighth night watch.

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[93] Walter Hof, p. 402.

4.2 The Poet's Demonic Predicament

The importance of this figure has not gone unnoticed in the secondary literature. Ellis Finger writes, "By far the most important of the secondary figures is the poet."[94], and Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey says of the poet: "Eine der wichtigsten und lebendigsten Gestalten der Nachtwachen lernen wir nur als Toten kennen."[95] From the beginning, the poet, a "man of extremes"[96], accompanies Kreuzgang in his nightly vigils. While he is never directly allowed to speak, the reader is introduced to what can, in no uncertain terms, be called a 'possessed' figure. Ostracized and debt-ridden, he nonetheless feels compelled to express himself in poetry, even if he 'preaches' on deaf ears:

> Ich wußte wohl, wer da so hoch in den Lüften regierte; es war ein verunglückter Poet, der nur in der Nacht wachte, weil dann seine Gläubiger schliefen, und die Musen allein nicht zu den letzten gehörten. (I, p. 10)

Without a doubt, this figure appears as the epitomy of Romanticism: "Ein Darsteller seines Weltschmerzes, so scheint

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[94] Ellis Finger, p. 288.

[95] Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 54.

[96] Judith Pond, p. 36.

es, das etwas kitschige Klischee seines Berufes."[97] While on the surface this analogy may be apt, the figure of the poet brings into focus a very real and, for the artist, very painful condition. Here the reader sees the largest discrepancy between art and reality, the ideal and the demeaning 'Wirklichkeit'. Kreuzgang compares himself to the poet, and in so doing only more clearly presents the poet's dionysian lust for the abstract, and how 'weltfremd' this type of art has become: "Ich", he states, "bin dir gleichsam in den Weg gestellt und unterbreche deine Träume von Unsterblichkeit, die du da oben in der Luft traumst, hier unten auf der Erde regelmäßig durch die Erinnerung an die Zeit und Vergänglichkeit" (I, p. 10). As Rado Pribic writes: "He [the poet] sits in his cloudy tower dreaming about immortality while starving to death."[98]

This relationship between what could be and what is is necessarily demonic. The poet's dreams allow him to realize, in art, the extent of the possibilites the universe offers, but in attempting to transcend his own existence, he only distances himself from reality further. While Kreuzgang can callously conclude, "Die Menschen sind wenn sie handeln hochst alltäglich und man mag ihnen höchstens wenn sie traumen einiges Interesse abgewinnen" (III, p. 26), his poet is the

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97 Peter Kohl, p. 71.

98 Rado Pribic, Slawische Beiträge, p. 73.

manifestation in flesh and blood of where this 'Interesse' may lead, namely into the frigid and lonely 'Nichts'. Again, in the chaos between ideal and reality the devil lurks, and both ideal and reality become a parody: the ideal because it is too lofty, and reality because it is common and mean.

The poet's suicide in the eighth night watch crystallizes the effect that the conflict between ideal and reality can produce. The 'Idealist' is forced to accept reality, and because he cannot, he decides to kill himself. As Kreuzgang observes:

> Der Stadtpoet auf seinem Dachkämmerchen gehörte auch zu den Idealisten, die man mit Gewalt durch Hunger, Gläubiger, Gerichtsfrohne u.s.w. zu Realisten bekehrt hatte, wie Karl der Große die Heiden mit dem Schwerdte in den Fluß trieb, damit sie dort zu Christen getauft würden. (VIII, p. 96)

Peter Kohl interprets this passage as a clear meaning that art simply does not pay: "Die Bekehrung vom Idealismus zum Realismus, die der Dachstubenpoet nur literarisch vollziehen mag, was ihn aber nicht vor dem Selbstmord bewahrt, kann demnach in der Realität nur heißer, die brotlose Kunst sein zu lassen."[99] Kreuzgang's earlier advice to the poet, to find an "ehrliches Handwerk, das seinen Mann ernährt" (I, p. 10), seems to substantiate this claim. What the work clearly demonstrates, however, is that the poet simply cannot give up his illusions, even against what appears to be better judgement. This is where the demonic element inherent in the

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[99] Peter Kohl, p. 73.

poet comes into play, which manifests itself in the self destructive need to create.

Ample demonstrations of this drive are given through Kreuzgang's descriptions of the poet at work. As the protagonist reports:

> Ich hatte mit dem Nachtraben Bekanntschaft gemacht und lief wenn ich meine Karte als einen Zeitschein in die Nachtuhr geschoben hatte, oft zu ihm hinauf, um seinem Gähren und Brausen zuzuschauen, wenn er dort oben als begeisteter Apostel mit der Flamme auf dem Haupte gegen die Menschen zürnte: (VIII, p. 97)

The poet seems trapped in his work, and serves as a 'living' symbol for the "Tragödie", which his "ganzes Genie", (VIII, p. 97) is attempting to produce. This work, the tragedy "Der Mensch", which, ironically enough, already ends with the prologue, represents a microcosm of the Nachtwachen, and it is here where a definition of the 'Nichts', which envelops both the poet and Kreuzgang, can be found: "das Leben ist nur das Schellenkleid das das Nichts umgehängt hat, um damit zu klingeln und es zulezt grimmig zu zerreißen und von sich zu schleudern" (VIII, p. 107).

> By the time we progress to his drama, these frustrations [the reality of his situation] have mounted, twisting his dreams of immortality into the cynical critiques of a world-weary nihilist. His earlier transcendence above worldly needs has now been shattered by the very insufficiencies he had sought to surmount.[100]

The difference between the protagonist and poet lies in the poet's suicide. Kreuzgang, unlike the poet, recognizes and

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[100] Ellis Finger, p. 288.

accepts the reality that the poet does not. So Ellis Finger: "And among its [Kreuzgang's/poet's] most provocative features is the difference between Kreuzgang's grudging accomodation to the disparaties of life and the poet's refusal to continue living in face of such overwhelming odds."[101] In this context Rado Pribic's comment that "because of their emotionality and heightened imagination poets are particularly prone to irrationality"[102], is not entirely correct. Both Kreuzgang's and the poet's behaviour are as rational as is possible in a chaotic and apparently meaningless world, in which anything of substance is exposed as a "Larve" (VIII, p. 107). It is the poet's inability to conform to reality, to admit that he must balance art with the ability to procure the means necessary to survive physically that makes him seem irrational. The demonic 'Steigerung' the poet goes through and which ends in his death alludes to the end that Kreuzgang cheats by acquiring a craft and a job.

> The poet is in a very real sense the watchman's alter ego; he has remained with the career with which the watchman began, and represents the end to which the watchman would necessarily have come had he not given up poetry.[103]

The unbridgeable difference between ideal and reality becomes apparent once more in the picture of the poet's youth.

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101 Ellis Finger, p. 289.

102 Rado Pribic, Slawische Beiträge, p. 73.

103 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 45.

Here, in the 'innocence' of childhood, the world, again ideally, seems at peace.

> Hier im Bilde lachte die Kindheit noch um ihn, und er stand in dem Frühlingsgarten voll geschlossener Blumenknospen, nach deren Duft er sich sehnte und die ihm nur als Giftblumen aufbrachen und ihm den Tod gaben. (VIII, p. 100)

The dead poet is a viscious intrusion upon this scene, and again, even in death, the ideal is confronted and destroyed by a seemingly insurmountable reality. Kreuzgang compares the "lächelnden umlokten Kindskopf" with the "Hypokratisches Gesichte [...], das schwarz und schreklich wie ein Medusenhaupt in seine Jugend schauete" (VIII, pp. 100-101). Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey concurs, and writes: "Das tote Bild spricht vom blühenden Leben, der lebende wirkliche Mensch vom grausigen Tode. In ihnen stehen sich gegenüber Traum und Wirklichkeit, Erwartung und Erfüllung."[104] So that the reader does not miss the symbolic importance of this confrontation, and is well aware of the demonic aspect to the process that has destroyed the poet, Kreuzgang highlights this aspect in his closing comments on the poet's death:

> O die Leidenschaften sind die tückischen Retouschirer, die den blühenden Rafaelskopf der Jugend mit den fortschreitenden Jahren auffrischen und durch immer härtere Züge entstellen und verzerren, bis aus dem Engelshaupt eine höllenbreugelische Larve geworden ist. (VIII, p. 101)

Against reality the poet does not stand a chance. A

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[104] Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 58.

devilish spiral is born, in which the artist attempts to make himself independent of the reality which surrounds him through the power of his thoughts and ideals. Even in pessimism, or so Jeffrey Sammons summarizes the poet's reasoning, there may be found an answer: "His satirical vocation is devilish both as a source of misery and pessimism, and as an ineluctable urge to reveal the truth."[105] Unfortunately, however, the poet, even if he risks starvation for the sake of his work, is caught in a trap, for he cannot find a publisher for his ideas (VIII, p. 98). It is at this point that he kills himself, and his death amply proves that the poet, who has attempted to transcend reality is, in the end, even more closely bound to reality than he ever imagined. Not only would he, if he continued to write, starve, but, even worse, without a publisher, he could not even communicate the ideas for which he has made so many sacrifices. As if to underscore the existential nihilism at work here, mice are already beginning to gnaw at and destroy the work which has cost the poet his life. "[...] Für das leztere [Hunger] schien beinah eine dritte [Maus] zu entscheiden, die sehr eifrig an der Unsterblichkeit seinem retourgegangenen opere posthumo, nagte" (VIII, p.98).

In conclusion, then, the poet's existence, and, perhaps more importantly, his death, present, almost within a

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[105] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 86.

nutshell, the demonic frustration of the unsuccessful artist. Unlike Goethe's Faust, who makes a bet with, and receives support from, the power of darkness, the poet in the Nachtwachen cannot even find help here. In his "Absagebrief an das Leben", the poet elaborates on the extent of his failure. His ideals have been crushed, and he receives no spiritual guidance from any quarter. "Mein Mensch", he writes, "hat keinen Verleger gefunden weder als persona vera non ficta, für die lezte (meine Tragödie) will kein Buchhandler die Drukkosten herschießen, und um die erste, (mich selbst) bekümmert sich gar der Teufel nicht [...]" (VIII, p. 101). In his spiritual frustration, the poet again reveals his similarity to Kreuzgang. Neither artist nor night-watchman can find any comfort in the world, and although the poet decides to die, rather than continue to struggle, in the end his death proves nothing. If anything, this death only provides the protagonist with an excuse to continue to live, as there is nothing more meaningless than a meaningless death. Kreuzgang compromises, while the poet does not. The results of their actions, however, remain the same. Both, after investigating all possibilities, find no answers. It is no accident that the final word uttered by both, the poet in his letter and Kreuzgang in the cemetary is the word "Nichts" (VIII, p. 102; XVI, p. 199).

4.3 Kreuzgang and Art: Negation in Compromise?

The death of the poet occurs at exactly the half way point in the Nachtwachen. Both the absolute artist and suicide have, from this point forward, been ruled out as possibilities. Ellis Finger postulates that "[...] the poet's death presents itself as a figurative termination of two extremes - idealistic lyricism and self-consuming nihilism [...]", and concludes: "Elements of nihilism do survive, as do moments of lyrical exultation. But the life-threatening extremism of each is eliminated with the poet's symbolic suicide."[106] While this observation can be deemed essentially correct, and while nihilism does survive and dominate the remainder of the work, it has lost the dramatic flair, the dionysian rush to which the poet succumbs, manifesting itself rather in Kreuzgang's willingness to compromise art for the sake of existence. Nonetheless, Kreuzgang treats the poet with unusual sympathy, and as Gerald Gillespie notes, "[...] he [Kreuzgang] never despises genuine artists, [...] true artistry is virtually the only value he respects."[107]

Kreuzgang's sympathy for the failed artist is

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[106] Ellis Finger, p. 289.

[107] Gerald Gillespie. Introduction. Die Nachtwachen von Bonaventura. Edinburgh: University Press, 1972. p. 4.

understandable. Is he not himself in a similar predicament? But, as has already been discussed, Kreuzgang seems to compromise, and the question becomes whether or not the demonic quality inherent in the poet and his art are also evident in the protagonist. This is perhaps one of the most difficult and secretive aspects of the Nachtwachen: what exactly is Kreuzgang's position relative to art and the artist and consequently, how does Kreuzgang's example fit in with the configuration of the final triumphant 'Nichts'?

In this respect, it is perhaps helpful first to examine both the characters and literary setting through which Bonaventura has his protagonist comment and stride. The anonymous poet is but one poignant example, and he remains memorable principally because of his anonymity. Other artists are also present, and, as many of these lack the poet's, or even Kreuzgang's integrity, they are portrayed as dangerous buffoons. So for example the actor who 'pretends' to wish to commit suicide. Kreuzgang does here what he could not do with the poet - he attempts to save the apparently 'struggling' artist. The artist, however, is only playing a role, and Kreuzgang's efforts have again been in vain. This time it is the master of parody who is made a fool of, and the disappointment causes him to comment: "'O falsche Welt!' rief ich grimmig aus - 'an der nichts mehr wahrhaft ist, selbst bis auf die Haarzöpfe deiner Bewohner, du leerer abgeschmackter Tummelplatz von Narren und Masken [...]." (XII, p. 148)

Another, equally disappointing figure is the man in Lessing's wig. This individual, diametrically opposed to the poet in world view, has, at first glance, like Kreuzgang, compromised his artistic virtue. Rather than create out of idealism, this figure creates out of realism, that is, he creates what the public wishes to read. He presents himself to Kreuzgang as a figure who has been stifled by the weight of the past: "Ich seze der Unsterblichkeit nach, und werde von ihr nachgesezt!" (XII, p. 141). His style is comprised of the examples of former greats:

> Jetzt trieb ich's weiter, ich schrieb an große Geister um alten abgelegten Trödel, und das Glück wollte mir so wohl, daß ich jetzt in Schuhen einherschreite in denen einst Kant eigenfüßig ging, am Tage Göthens Hut auf Lessings Perücke setze, und zu Abends Schillers Schlafmütze trage, ja ich ging noch weiter, ich lernte weinen wie Kotzebue und niesen wie Tiek, und er glaubt nicht welchen Eindruck ich oft dadurch zuwege bringe, die Kreatur wohnt nun einmal im Leibe, und hat es mit diesem lieber zu thun, als mit dem Geiste [...]. (XII, p. 142)

As Hunter-Lougheed comments: "Er [der Mann in Kants Schuhen] ahmt ausschließlich die äußeren Gebärden bekannter großer Geister nach, nicht jedoch ihr Dichten [...]."[108] Finally, this phantasmagorical creation finishes off his lines with a thought that, in its cynical and world weary content, would have done even Kreuzgang proud. "Freund", he explains, "was

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[108] Rosemarie Hunter-Lougheed: "Der Mann In Kants Schuhen und Lessings Perücke: Eine unbekannte Quelle zu den Nachtwachen von Bonaventura." Aurora. Jahrbuch der Eichendorff-Gesellschaft 40 (1980). p. 148.

hat man von dieser Unsterblichkeit, wenn nach dem Tode die Perücke unsterblicher ist, als der Mann der sie trug?" (XII, p. 143)

Kreuzgang's reply, "Ich ließ den Narren laufen" (XII, p. 143), clearly indicates that he does not hold a very high opinion of this opportunistic artist. Between these two figures then, the reader can vaguely discern Kreuzgang's position. He is, on the one hand drawn to the idealistic poet, but is too realistic to choose this figure's path. On the other hand, he is also too idealistic to sanction the artistic 'frauds' in NW XII. Kreuzgang's own position, as these extreme examples show, lies somewhere in between those of the other two artist figures. Bonaventura's protagonist is trapped in a confusing chaos, which belies all attempts to define the role of the artist in society.

The background to Kreuzgang's position as an artist is that in such a world Kreuzgang cannot find a role-model that, for him, represents the 'perfect' artist. While Linde Katritzky can claim, "Goethe wird hier als hochster Wertmaßstab vorgestellt"[109], even he, the 'poet prince,' seems

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[109] Linde Katritzky: "Goethe in den Nachtwachen von Bonaventura und in den Schriften Georg Cristoph Lichtenbergs." Goethe Jb. 104 (1987). p. 158. Katritzkys's point becomes especially interesting in regard to the mention of the "Sonnenadler" (XII, p. 140). The 'Sonnenadler' can conform to one of two figures, namely either Napoleon or Goethe. Each of the two was dominant in his field, and the career of each can be likened to an eagle soaring in the sun. As is characteristic of the Nachtwachen, Bonaventura refuses to elaborate, and leaves it up to the reader to guess which figure is alluded to.

like a figure from the past; a literary monument to which the writers of Bonaventura's generation must bow in their own attempts to manifest their immortality. As the book so often, and in so many different ways shows, the devil and his realm prosper in confusion and chaos, and Kreuzgang's inability to find a sound artistic position which does not land him in jail, as nearly happens in NW VII, (pp. 94-95), is, in the current state of the world, simply impossible.

> There is a deep bitterness both in the watchman's abandonment of the literary profession and in the apparent impossibility of poetry in the world as the author constructs it, nowhere is literature itself really attacked as an empty or meaningless occupation.[110]

And yet, artistic role models do seem to exist. Jakob Böhme (I, p. 16, III, p. 41) and Hans Sachs (III, p. 41, VII, p. 88), as well as the often alluded to figure of Shakespeare, all appear in an almost idealized fashion in Kreuzgang's epic. "Hans Sachs und Shakespeare", Wolfgang Paulsen postulates, "waren für Bonaventura keine Gegensätze, sondern wechselseitige Ergänzungen."[111] In the case of Hans Sachs and Jakob Böhme, however, these figures are more important for their symbolic, rather than actual thematic value.

> [...] for what have the solid boureois wit and wisdom of Hans Sachs or the mystical flight, joyful communion with God and symbolic dualism of Böhme to

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[110] Jeffrey Sammons, pp. 98-99.

[111] Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 493.

> do with the corrosive nihilism of the watchman? Clearly nothing whatsoever.[112]

Both figures, then, serve as examples of a harmony between life (in the spiritual sense) and art. Both were artists, but both also worked, had a "soliden Posten" (XV, p. 182), and thus formed a synthesis between the two worlds of society and art which, in Kreuzgang's day, appear to have become polar opposites. Both were shoemakers, a profession with which Kreuzgang, through his stepfather, is intimately acquainted: "Jezt sizt er", we learn of Kreuzgang as a boy, "Tag und Nacht bei'm Jakob Böhme und Hans Sachs, welches zween gar absonderliche Schuhmacher waren, aus denen auch zu ihrer Zeit niemand klug werden konnte" (IV, p. 41).

The figures of Böhme and Sachs therefore serve, for Kreuzgang, as role models from bygone days. Both figures managed to write and be accepted as useful elements in society. Both writers, and this is very important in the context of this work, were also writers in the Christian tradition, that is, while both dealt overwhelmingly with the subject of evil; Böhme in a mystical, theoretical sense, and Sachs in the sense of parody and comedy, both were convinced of the actuality of the existence of their subject matter. As writers of the Reformation period and of the Baroque period respectively, the integrity of the world and the goodness of

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[112] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 61.

man were both to be questioned, but there was no question as to the existence of God.

> Bonaventura kennt keine weißen Schafe - wenn man allenfalls Jakob Böhme und Hans Sachs ausnimmt, die für ihn nicht als Autoren im engeren Sinne des Wortes und nicht als Menschen in Betracht kommen, sondern Chiffren sind für eine verlorene Welt.[113]

In this fashion then, Sachs and Böhme further serve Kreuzgang as enviable idols. Both achieved the uneasy synthesis between art and life which Kreuzgang idealizes, but both also serve as an example of writers who could question the spiritual fabric of the world without falling victim to the nihilism and emptiness that confronts Kreuzgang at every turn.

> Sachs and Böhme represent the world of clearly defined values and deep religious receptivity which has been left behind by the watchman. Sachs and Böhme then indicate not lasting influences upon Kreuzgang, but aspects of the childhood paradise which is irretrievably lost.[114]

As such, both figures represent an ideal of the possibilities once available to the artist in his field, possibilities that now survive only in Kreuzgang's imagination and his ideal of a better world. Almost tenderly, Kreuzgang combines his own ideals with the figure of Böhme during the death of the atheist in NW I:

> Den Sterbenden ist die Musik verschwistert, sie ist der erste süße Laut vom fernen Jenseits, und die Muse des Gesanges ist die mystische Schwester, die zum Himmel zeigt. So entschlummerte Jakob Böhme,

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[113] Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 452.

[114] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 61.

> indem er die ferne Musik vernahm, die Niemand, ausser dem Sterbenden hörte. (I, p. 16)

Shakespeare, the other idealized writer in the Nachtwachen, is mentioned perhaps more than any other artist in the work. Rather than the man himself, it is Shakespeare's dramatic characters which capture Kreuzgang's imagination. The dramas Macbeth (II, p. 22), King Lear (IV, p. 44) and, above all, Hamlet are alluded to, and Kreuzgang, who deems Shakespeare "[den] zweiten Schöpfer" (XIV, p. 158), seems to admire, in the English writer, the highest of literary ideals. Closer examination reveals, however, that Kreuzgang's love for Shakespeare is limited to only the tragedies, in which great men fall victim to and succumb to 'fate'. The Hamlet/Ophelia episode in NW XIV clarifies both Kreuzgang's admiration for Shakespeare, and provides perhaps the best practical example of the chaotic interaction between art and life as seen by the protagonist.

In the asylum, Kreuzgang, who once played 'Hamlet', encounters 'Ophelia', an actress who loses sight of the distinction between art and life. The distinction between role and life is completely obliterated, and Ophelia, for the reader knows her by no other name, wanders through a demonic twilight, in which the question of 'to be or not to be' takes on very real and very serious proportions. Kreuzgang, necessarily fascinated by this type of 'madness', at first appproaches Ophelia as though she were a scientific

phenomenon: "Für mich", he reports, "war es ein interessantes Schauspiel, dieses gewaltige Eingreifen einer Riesenhand in ein fremdes Leben, dieses Umschaffen der wirklichen Person zu einer poetischen [...]" (XIV, p. 158). The closer he comes to Ophelia, however, the more he, like her, appears to lose his objectivity. While he does not, at first, lose his identity (the reader does not know enough about Kreuzgang to think of him in terms of a concrete identity) it is his apparent objectivity, more than any other facet to his personality that characterizes him.

> Dies tolle Gefühl indeß, das sie Liebe nennen, und das wie ein Flicken vom Himmel auf diese dürre Steppe der Erde heruntergefallen ist, fing doch am Ende auch bei mir an es ernstlicher zu nehmen, und ich machte zu meinem eigenen Entsetzen mehrere Gedichte in Versen [...]. (XIV, p. 159)

The loss of objectivity in Kreuzgang also entails a loss of distance from subject to object. While the protagonist has, through his apparent objectivity, been able to view society and art from a distance, that is, without direct involvement, he is now, through his emotions, forced to participate actively both in art and in life. He has momentarily lost his status as an outsider. Kreuzgang is both aware and frightened of the dangers this involvement brings with it. He writes to Ophelia: "Zorniger, wilder, menschenfeindlicher hat es in mir seit meiner Geburt nicht ausgesehen, als in diesem Augenblicke, wo ich es dir aufgebracht hinschreibe, daß ich dich liebe" (XIV, p. 164). He wishes to return to the safety

of his former world view, but finds himself inexplicably drawn into the vortex of human emotion, which revolves around a character unsure of her own identity. Ophelia, then, portrays a character who has also lost all objectivity; in whom the transition from subject, that is art, to object, her own identity, is complete. She is unable, in her own words, to determine "ob ich selbst liebe, oder nur mein Name Ophelia - und ob die Liebe selbst etwas ist, oder nur ein Name" (XIV, p. 165).

The result of this multilayered love, in which both partners actively couple emotion with art reflects the essence of Bonaventura's universe. The resulting confusion, which goes as far as the "Selbstwechsel" (XIV, p. 167) and includes not only the physical act of lovemaking, the surrender of the objective self, but also the synthesis between art and life, is doomed. Both Ophelia and her child die, and the 'product' of the union between art and life, ideal and reality perishes. Kreuzgang retains his former objectivity, his distance, but the experience has embittered the protagonist, and has convincingly reinforced his former nihilism.

While Shakespeare's Hamlet forms only the peripheral, or rather the metafictional outline of this play within a play (the Kreuzgang/Ophelia episode within the framework of Hamlet), it immediately becomes apparent that this almost too human drama has almost nothing to do with Shakespeare's play. Like Böhme or Sachs, Shakespeare's plays are also used as a

symbol, in this case, to reflect Kreuzgang's chaotic and pessimistic world view. "Nur der Welthaß selbst verbindet ihn [Kreuzgang] mit Hamlet, nicht das damit verbundene Leiden an der Zerfallenheit mit der Welt des Shakespeareschen Helden."[115] Shakespeare, in the end, is an example which Kreuzgang can use to reflect his own ideas better. Again, a certain metafictional component to the work becomes visible, as Kreuzgang, guided by the invisible Bonaventura, rewrites the plays of his most revered author.

> Kreuzgang [im Irrenhaus] läßt sich auf keine Norm und kein gültiges Denkschema festlegen. Er ist der Schöpfer einer poetischen, systematisch verkehrten und sich selbst auch wieder relativierenden Gegenwelt.[116]

In NW XV art again dominates the events. This time, Kreuzgang, together with the director and choreographer of a puppet theatre, stages a puppet production. After the catastrophic personal setback in NW XIV, Kreuzgang here appears as a 'creator' figure, and, after a "flüchtigen theoretischen Unterricht" (NW XV, p. 176), he begins again to take part acting in the production, this time in conjunction with his beloved "Hanswurst". The produced play almost results in violence, is censured, and the puppets are confiscated. The director hangs himself, symbolically enough from a cloud which

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115 Klaus Bartenschlager, p. 357.

116 Franz Loquai, p. 150.

formed part of the stage setting. On the surface, the episode with the town poet appears to repeat itself.

> Nonetheless, like the disturbed town poet, he [the director] kills himself over the loss of his private universe which gets out of control, that is, which mirrors the primitive relationships of the bigger world accurately enough to trigger violence, with its repercussions.[117]

Again, Kreuzgang's attempts to express himself artistically meet with failure. Kreuzgang the 'creator' fails, this time due to the ignorance of fellow man and society, much like Kreuzgang the person failed in the night-watch before. It is not by accident that at this point Kreuzgang decides to take the job of night-watchman, after it has become obvious that he cannot succeed as an artist. Like Hans Sachs and Jakob Böhme, Kreuzgang has decided to temper his role as an artist with a 'career' of sorts, the difference being that in the figures of Böhme and Sachs, the two occupations could co-exist peacefully, whereas in Kreuzgang's case, his work of art, the writing of the Nachtwachen, has become almost a personal experience with little hope of public acceptance. In the end, it is little more than an outlet through which the night-watchman can vent his rage and frustration.

Finally, then, after examining Kreuzgang's various relationships to artists and art, the question of the relationship of art to the night watchman can again be raised. The death of the poet shows that Kreuzgang is sympathetic to

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[117] Gerald Gillespie, Introduction, p. 16.

this figure, but not willing to go to the same idealistic extremes as this character. Other characters, however, such as the 'Mann in Kants Schuhen', show that Kreuzgang does not take the 'easy way out', he is not willing to water down his writing in order to exist on art alone.

His use of other literary examples, such as Hans Sachs, Jakob Böhme and William Shakespeare, show that Kreuzgang, himself the book's ultimate realist, does possess some idealistic notions, which manifest themselves in the examples of these bygone authors. As the Hamlet/Ophelia episode shows, Kreuzgang is himself willing to attempt to live art, but this necessarily fails. In the disillusionment that follows, Kreuzgang accepts the position of night watchman, and seems to resign himself to fate and perhaps, most importantly, to compromise.

However, it is exactly here in Kreuzgang's willingness to compromise, that the demonic aspect in the protagonist's relationship to art can be found. Art, and especially the production of art, it seems, is negated. Through the attempts of the other figures in the novel to create, as well as through Kreuzgang's own experiences, the reader witnesses one failure after another. Art, at least in the present day and age, seems to have little influence on society. "Doch getötet wird auch der Glaube an die Kunst und den Künstler, ein ganz

neuer und moderner Zug."[118] This idea, pessimistic as it may be, appears to be substantiated in the Nachtwachen. As the novel proves, art increasingly begins to revolve around the theme of art, and loses the potency to comment effectively on society. Increasing specialization and complexity, as well as the loss of a homogenous world view dominated by one God have lead art astray, and, as Gerald Gillespie comments: "If suffering is to remain authentic and not degenerate into phony sensibility, only sardonic, self-critical art can cope with it."[119]

Kreuzgang, frustrated by his inability to express his creative impulses, becomes cornered and, as the novel progresses, he is forced into silence even more. After the sixth night watch, when Kreuzgang announces the phony Judgement Day, his night-watchman's horn is taken away. Symbolically, Kreuzgang is reduced to silence.

> He [Kreuzgang] is now walled up in a paralyzing vault of silence from which he may observe the activities of the world, while remaining unable to effectively awaken society's conscience to the dangers or injustices which he notices taking place before him.[120]

Kreuzgang's new 'silence' is reinforced by the failures of art

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[118] Hermann Granzow: Künstler und Gesellschaft im Roman der Goethezeit. Diss., Bonn, 1960. p. 118.

[119] Gerald Gillespie: "Bonaventura's Romantic Agony: Prevision of an Art of Existential Despair." Modern Language Notes 85 (1970). p. 725.

[120] Judith Pond, p. 29.

and artist around him. Not only is he forbidden to express himself, but, as the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that he is simply unable to do so. The resulting "dichtende Annihilation"[121] necessarily terminates in nihilism.

Kreuzgang's predicament is, in every way, fundamentally demonic, as he well knows. The key to understanding Kreuzgang's relationship to art is found in the line "Ich bannte diesen poetischen Teufel in mir, der am Ende immer nur schadenfroh über meine Schwäche aufzulachen pflegte [...]" (II, p. 17). The need and drive to communicate is offset by the inability to express the desired intentions cohesively. The quest for the essence of being, the uncovering of 'Hülsen' and 'Larven', which art has helped to accomplish, has lead nowhere. There is no noteworthy meaning to life, and no nobility in man, supposedly God's 'chosen' creature. In Kreuzgang, the artistic process has, if anything, helped to cultivate the misanthropic hatred which, with growing intensity, characterizes the night-watchman. "Dieser Künstler", Hermann Granzow notes: "ist stolz auf seinen Haß, ist er doch sein einziger Besitz."[122] He concludes that:

> Sie [Kreuzgangs Haß und Verachtung] sind vielmehr Ausdruck der Defensive, in die er sich gedrängt sieht. Seine Tiraden richten sich ja gegen einen unverwundbaren Feind und zeugen nur von der Schwäche

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[121] Alfons Knauth: "Luckys und Bonaventuras unglückliche Weltansichten. Ein Vergleich von Becketts En attend Godot mit den Nachtwachen von Bonaventura." Romanistisches Jahrbuch 26 (1976). p. 165.

[122] Hermann Granzow, p. 119.

> einer Kunst, die jeder Einwirkung auf das Leben beraubt ist. Das Leben braucht die Kunst nicht mehr.[123]

As is not uncommon in the Nachtwachen, the creative process as a whole, which is characterized by all the artistic figures in the novel, including Kreuzgang, serves to illustrate yet again the relationship of God to man. Like God, the artist is a Creator, who creates ideals, visions and even, in the case of the poet and the Marionettendirektor, entire worlds. All of these lofty realms, however, are doomed to failure. The 'Nichts' is all encompassing and total. The same message can also apply to God, who, as a Creator appears also to have failed. Like the creations of the artists, God's 'Creation' is exposed as a sham. God becomes the writer upon whom an expectant mankind should no longer rely. In such a situation, the devil's triumph is complete, as he has managed to undermine not only art, but the spiritual fabric of society as a whole.

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[123] Hermann Granzow, p. 119.

5. Nature

5.1 Nature: The Demonic Ideal

Of central importance to Bonaventura's Nachtwachen is the environment, or the setting, within which the events that form the disjointed plot of the work fall. Unfortunately, the criticism regarding this work has not yet focussed on this theme, although several critics have begun to recognize that the environmental backdrop closely reflects the intellectual position of the novel's protagonist. Jeffrey Sammons, for example, notes: "Nature is not a stage-prop in the Nachtwachen; it is an existential problem."[124] As Kreuzgang's reasoning ostentatiously displays demonic characteristics, the question as to the presence of similar elements within the depiction of the setting is not unfounded.

Before analysis of any kind can begin, it is of primary importance to distinguish between the terms "nature" and "environment" within the context of the book's setting. "Nature", which Kreuzgang celebrates in an uncommonly jubilant fashion, differs entirely from the outlandish, brooding and somber atmosphere almost continually present in the

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[124] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 107.

Nachtwachen. In short, therefore, nature exists as an ideal, and forms part of the spectrum of Kreuzgang's intellectual perceptions. This "ideal" is sharply contrasted by the actual environment, which is a creation of Bonaventura's, and into which the night-watchman is cast. While this "environment" is by no objective means "realistic", it does, for the purpose of the novel, present a negative and disillusioning "reality", which is very much consistent with the remainder of the novel's themes.

Bonaventura's attitude toward nature is therefore not "disturbingly ambivalent",[125] but rather it presents nature as a poetic possibility, a "dionysischer Aufschwung"[126] and a harmonic balance into which man, perhaps partly due to his meddlesome moralising, can no longer integrate himself. As such, then, the "theme" of nature is touched on only twice in the Nachtwachen, namely in XI and XIII. In the XIth night watch it is the "Unbekannter im Mantel"(XI, p. 134), the blind man who is granted the gift of sight who descibes the beauty of what he sees:

> Überall war Heiligthum - der Frühling lag wie ein süßer Traum an den Bergen und auf den Fluren - die Sterne des Himmels brannten als Blumen in dem dunkeln Grase, aus tausend Quellen stürzte das Lichtmeer herab in die Schöpfung, und die Farben stiegen darin wie wunderbare Geister auf. Ein All von Liebe und Leben - rothe Früchte und blühende Kränze in den Bäumen, und duftende Gewinde um Hügel und Berge - in den Trauben brennende Diamanten - die

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125 Gerald Gillespie: Introduction. Nachtwachen. p. 21.

126 Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 39.

> Schmetterlinge als fliegende gaukelnde Blumen in den Lüften - Gesang aus tausend Kehlen, schmetternd, jubelnd, lobpreisend - und das Auge Gottes aus dem unendlichen Weltmeere zurückschauend und aus der Perle im Blumenkelche. (XI, p. 139)

In the thirteenth night watch it is Kreuzgang himself who composes the "Dithyrambus über den Frühling" (XIII, p. 149); a hymn which marks the passing of winter and the advent of spring.

> Die Bäume schlingen ihre Zweige in duftige Kränze, und reichen sie zum Himmel empor; der Adler steigt betend in den Sonnenglanz auf, wie zu Gott, und die Lerche wirbelt ihm nach, jubelnd über der geschmückten Erde. Jeder duftende Kelch wird zu einer Brautkammer, jedes Blatt ist eine kleine Welt, und alles saugt Leben und Liebe an dem heißen Herzen der Mutter! (XIII, pp.149-150)

While both of these jubilant accounts are the products of different narrators, both have very much in common. Both seem to reveal a fascination with, and appreciation for, the beauty of nature, and in both, the biting satire which characterizes the Nachtwachen is conspicuously absent. In both, the harmony and beauty of nature are described in religious terms; in nature a curious synthesis between God, the "Schöpfer", and mother nature, "die alte Fee, die Erde" (XIII, p. 149) appears plausible. "Das allgemeine Erwachen weist zunächst weniger auf einen Schöpfergott zurück als auf die Allesgebärerin 'Mutter Natur' (...)."[127] While Kupper correctly suggests that it is nature, and not God, which is

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[127] Peter Küpper: "Unfromme Vigilien. Bonaventuras Nachtwachen." Festschrift für Richard Alewyn. Köln, Graz,: Bohlau, 1967. p. 321.

the actual "creative" force in both of these episodes, the perfection present in this idyllic harmony does make the existence of a benevolent "Creator" appear, at least momentarily, as a romantic possibility, and "only nature resists the nihilistic dualism. It is calm and lovely, a harmonious cycle of fertility."[128]

The dream-like character of both "visions", however, is shattered by an encroaching reality which crassly turns the ideal into a wishful and painful fantasy. For the blind man, the restauration of his vision means the banishment of his beloved to a monastery, where she is buried alive for bearing the apparently fortunate man's child. "O Nacht", the Unbekannter moans, "Nacht, kehre zurück! Ich ertrage all das Licht und die Liebe nicht länger!" (XI, p. 139). Kreuzgang's vision is also confined by the open ended question of man, who refuses to fit into the Eden-like vision of nature. "Nur der Mensch -" (XIII, p. 150), he begins, and cannot finish the thought. Sammons notes that "Nature left to herself produces not ideal beauty, but disharmony and distortion (...)."[129] This thought should perhaps be changed to read that man, when attempting to fit himself into nature's spectrum, produces only disharmony and distortion.

As such, the Nachtwachen again display an intellectual

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[128] Rado Pribic, Slawische Beiträge, p. 146.

[129] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 53.

superstructure that places it well ahead of its time. Man has alienated himself from nature, perhaps the greatest of the Romantic ideals, so far that any harmonious vision of nature becomes a wishful and subjective farce; quite literally a dream that, in the context of the Nachtwachen, is exposed as a mask, in much the same way that love is exposed as a painful joke. "Die Liebe ist nicht schon - es ist nur der Traum der Liebe der entzückt" (X, p. 123), Kreuzgang callously notes, and his experiences in NW XIV appear to justify the remark. The same train of thought can be said to apply to nature. Again, the dream is enticing, but man's intellectual development has made impossible a comfortable and, perhaps more importantly, an unconcious existence within the framework provided by nature.

When viewed in this light, Bonaventura roughly outlines many of the philosophical ideas expressed over half a century later by Friedrich Nietzsche.

> Wodurch aber der Mensch sich den Blick auf das Göttliche verstellt hat, ist dies, daß er der Natur fremd geworden ist. Das soll allerdings nicht sagen, daß der Mensch in Unwissenheit über die Natur lebe. Im Gegenteil, die Natur-Entfremdung geht zusammen mit einer gewaltigen Steigerung des Wissens von der Natur, ja dies Wissen ist in der Art, wie es heute vorhanden ist, gerade durch die Natur-Entfremdung möglich geworden. Die Natur-Entfremdung besteht aber darin, daß der Mensch sich selbst nicht mehr als ein Wesen versteht, das in dem Zusammenhang der Natur gehört, sondern das außerhalb ihrer steht, das übernatürlich ist.[130]

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130 Walter Bröcker, p. 178.

Bröcker pessimistically concludes, as perhaps Kreuzgang perceives but cannot, due to the lack of philosophical background, yet express, that "jedes Ideal muß unnatürlich sein, weil sein Sinn gerade ist: die Herrschaft über die Natur."[131] By idealizing nature, man only alienates himself from his source still more, and the objective he desires, a reintegration into the natural and harmonious cycle of life, is made still more impossible.

In this yawning and continually growing gap between the ideal and the reality of ever increasing isolation lurks, as Kreuzgang cannot help but discover, the devil, and the viscious spiral that is born when longing for the ideal and pointlessly hoped for synthesis between nature and man is necessarily demonic. While Gillespie goes too far when he claims that "despite its perplexing splendours, "nature" possesses for him (Kreuzgang) no ultimate meaning except as a model of horror",[132] he does correctly identify that because "man has lost his protective naiveté, all he can now know is the echo of his own thoughts trapped within a dying system."[133] As Kreuzgang himself writes, after his attempted composition "Dithyrambus über den Frühling" is brought to a grinding halt:

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131 Walter Bröcker, p. 172.

132 Gerald Gillespie: Introduction. Nachtwachen, p. 2.

133 Greald Gillespie: Introduction. Nachtwachen, p. 13.

"Ich höre nichts, als Wiederhall, Wiederhall meiner eigenen Rede - bin ich denn allein?" (XIII, p. 150)

5.2 Night: The Devil's Playground

If the collective term "nature" serves, in the course of the Nachtwachen, mainly to illustrate the disillusioning quality of yet another disappointed ideal, then the reality that is the Nachtwachen is encapsulated in the cold, dark and misanthropic sphere that is Bonaventura's night. "Sie (night)", writes Helmut Müller, "ist der Schatten des Lebens, von nicht geringerer Wirklichkeit als das Licht und von der gleichen Lebensfülle."[134] As the title suggests, the Nachtwachen are a novel that deals with darkness, a darkness which reveals what light "obscures."

As such, then, Bonaventura's night has as much of a structural function as it does a symbolic one.

> Aber ebenso wie der Raum ein symbolischer Raum ist und das Im-Raum-Sein eigentlich Im-Nichts-Sein bedeutet, so ist auch die Zeit keine reale, weder fließende noch stehende, sondern nur funktionale Zeit.[135]

Just as there is no real spacial reality in the novel, there is no consistency in the dimension attributed to time. The

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[134] Helmut Müller: Introduction. Die Nachtwachen von Bonaventura. München: Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1960. p. 5.

[135] Dieter Arendt: Der poetische Nihilismus in der deutschen Romantik. Studien zum Verhältnis von Dichtung und Wirklichkeit in der Frühromantik. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1972. p. 525.

reader loses all track of time, and only a persistent and skilled reader can sort out the chaotic night-watches, which jump backwards and forwards in time. "(...) die Nacht ist da, es gibt kein Anbrechen der Nacht, aber auch keine Dämmerung, kein vorher, aber auch kein nachher."[136] In short, past and future are combined to form a murky present, whose only point of reference is the omnipresent night.[137] "Die nächtliche Perspektive," so Sölle-Nipperdey, "die sich aus der so verstandenen Fiktion ergibt, ist an keiner Stelle durchbrochen. Sie bleibt die Perspektive, unter der die Welt angeschaut wird."[138]. Johann Leopoldseder takes Sölle-Nipperdey's criticism one step further when he claims, "Der Raum-Zeitbegriff Nacht wird durchgehend zum Raumbegriff, zum Existenzraum."[139]

Not only does Bonaventura allow his protagonist to destroy the reader's perception of time and space, and to

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136 Johann Leopoldseder: Groteske Welt. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Nachtstücks in der Romantik. Bonn: Bouvier, 1973. p. 81.

137 A particularly interesting point is made in this regard by Wolfgang Paulsen (P. 500), who notes that the "Wonnemonat" (IX, p. 120) Kreuzgang spends in the Asylum with Ophelia must have been at least nine months long, as Ophelia conceives and bears Kreuzgang's child during this period of time. While this 'oversight' on Bonaventura's part may be further proof of the 'amateurish' quality several critics like to attribute to the work, it is much more likely, in its negligence, an indication that time is simply of little importance in the Nachtwachen.

138 Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 18.

139 Johann Leopoldseder, p. 81.

replace it with a nihilistic version of time and endless night, where "Raum, Nacht und Nichts"[140] become one; his watchman also uses his surrealistic nocturnal cover to do away with other conventional narrative practices, such as description and detail, "favouring", in Ellis Finger's words, "elliptical, even twisted and fragmented lines of depiction over straightforward accuracy of detail".[141]

The best available example the text offers is the retelling of the disjointed Hanswurst-Kolombine episode of NW IV in NW V, the only one of the "night" watches composed and written during the day. The multilevel and metafictional story in IV becomes a sentimentally laden parody of itself, and Kreuzgang uses the "hellen prosaischen Tag" (NW V, p. 61) to translate the events of the "poetisch tolle Nacht" into "klare langweilige Prosa" (NW V, p. 61). Gillespie correctly concludes that "(...) V is intended to contrast with IV as a lesser with a greater form".[142]

The result of Kreuzgang's refusal to provide the expected and necessary details and descriptions is that the reader is continually forced, like Kreuzgang himself, to view the events that form the background to the novel as through a shroud; the chaotic world view presented by the protagonist is realized

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140 Johann Leopoldseder, p. 83.

141 Ellis Finger, p. 286.

142 Gerald Gillespie: Introduction. Nachtwachen, p. 8.

in the structural lack of clarity in the Nachtwachen, and again, the nocturnal perspective, which can reveal only shapes, disproportionate images and stark contrasts between white and black, supplants the customary descriptive palate, with which the conventional author can produce a detailed and colourful narrative structure for his audience. "The chosen scenes, furthermore, are drained of coloration and nuance by virtue of stark monochromatic imprints. Fineness of detail is deliberately avoided; bold slashes of light and dark create outlines at the expense of interpretive embellishment."[143] The night, which serves both to illustrate and to confuse, displays, even as a structural element, the demonic quality of a chaos that intrudes and threatens to swallow the, at the time, prevalent "ordered" forms of literary presentation.

At the same time, the night also serves as a central thematic element in the Nachtwachen. To Peter Küpper, the night is "bizarr, düster und von grellen Blitzen erleuchtet, grotesk, barock, romantisch und dabei unheimlich modern."[144] Helmut Müller, on the other hand, sees in the night motif a reaction to an Enlightenment which refused to address the "night-side" to human life, and thus portrayed only a one sided and elliptical view of man and society.

> Eine einseitige Aufklärung hatte, um die Heiligkeit ihrer Vernunft nicht zu verdunkeln, den Schatten des Lebens gemieden, hatte alle die ungehobenen und

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143 Ellis Finger, p. 285.

144 Peter Küpper, p. 309.

> unsichtbaren Schätze der Nacht mit ängstlicher Vorsicht umgangen - freilich nur auf Kosten des Lebens.[145]

The critics also differ with regard to the different functions they feel this theme serves. To Wolfgang Paulsen, the night motif serves as a cover, "Nur einen einzigen positiven Wert hat diese Nacht Bonaventuras: sie verdeckt, indem sie das den Menschen blendende Licht ausschließt, es ist die Zeit des Schlafens und damit des momentanen Ausgelöschtseins, in der das Böse im einzelnen immobilisiert ist."[146] Jeffrey Sammons, on the other hand, has a diametrically opposed and, with regard to the work, a much more realistic view of the purpose of this theme, "The night retains its terror and lack of clarity, but for him [Kreuzgang] these things are true, they are a reflection of the basically chaotic, irrational universe which the perspective of daytime serves only to distort."[147] He concludes that the "monochromatic barrenness"[148] of night provides the "environment in which the truth can be told."[149] While this can, in essence, be deemed correct, Helmut Müller's word of caution, "Es (Nacht) kann zu den verborgenen Schätzen führen;

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145 Helmut Müller, p. 5.

146 Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 465-66.

147 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 109.

148 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 84.

149 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 83.

es kann sich aber auch im Chaos der dunklen Gänge totlaufen"[150] is certainly apt, as this is exactly what happens: the nocturnal perspective may allow Kreuzgang to ask all the right questions, but the novel's end, and the thrice repeated "Nichts" (XVI, pp 198-199) serve as a stinging rebuke, as well as a reminder that Kreuzgang's attempts, on the whole, have certainly not given rise to any form of positive enlightenment.

While some critics, such as Hermann Korff, see in this motif, and in the profession of the night-watchman, an underlying romantic motif: "(...) das Romantische dieses Berufes aber liegt in seiner Nächtlichkeit (...)"[151] others, such as Rado Pribic, interpret this motif as a step away from romantic emotionalism: "Because of his wickedness, man prefers the night, for everything in him shuns the light and is dangerous. Thus, night is not any more the romantic mystical time, it is the time of vices, crimes and immorality."[152] Regardless, it is undeniable that Kreuzgang is, on the one hand, as a protagonist very much a product of the night side of the Romantic period who, due to his extreme radicalism, and, at first glance, unsympathetic character, leaves the

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150 Helmut Müller, p. 5.

151 Hermann Korff: Geist der Goethezeit. Versuch einer ideellen Entwicklung der klassisch-romantischen Literaturgeschichte. Vol. III. Koehler & Amelung, 1966. p. 214.

152 Rado Pribic, Slawische Beiträge, p. 84.

Romantic period far behind. Whatever the case, the night motif expresses perhaps better than any other motif Kreuzgang's inner thoughts and emotions, and thus provides an important insight into Kreuzgang's psyche.

"Die Nachtstunde schlug", the novel begins, "ich hüllte mich in meine abenteuerliche Vermummung (...)" (I, p. 9). From the beginning, then, the reader is confronted not only with darkness, but also with another of the themes central to the work, namely the "Ver-hüllen" and the "Vermummung" of things and ideas. In this environment, things are both revealed and hidden, misshapen and realigned to provide a "deeper" insight into the texture, or, in this case, the uncohesive and nonsensical workings of the supposedly sleeping world. Both world and protagonist, however, defy a consistent unmasking. A chaotic web, in which one mask exposes another, "eine Hülse sitzt über der anderen", as Ophelia stipulates, is realized. The result is a brooding and inconsistent nihilism, about which Kreuzgang's soulmate can rightfully claim: "ich bin oft auf dem Punkte den Verstand darüber zu verlieren" (XIV, p. 164).

The upheaval, which characterizes Kreuzgang and his world, is reflected in and by his environment. Helmut Müller's claim: "Düster sind die Geschäfte der Nacht, traurig und todesschwanger, und traurig ist auch der Beruf des

Nachtwächters"[153], and Sölle Nipperdey's statement that the night presents an "(...) Atmosphäre der Unheimlichkeit, in der man sich an kein Ding halten kann"[154], are both correct, but do not reflect the essential quality of this brooding and all-encompassing night, namely its chaotic inconsistency. This quality is reflected by two other motifs, namely lightning and the storm.

The night-watchman, the reader must quickly note, is not only surrounded by night, but by an environment that is characterized by violent thunder storms, winter and lightning. Just as there is no peace in Kreuzgang's inner being, there is no peace in the reality which is Bonaventura's night. Jeffrey Sammons notes that "(...) the storm as a manifestation of nature has acquired meaning and has become integrated into the 'Gehalt'."[155]

The night is not consistently dark: it is illuminated, and becomes surrealistically demonic because of the very "light" which might otherwise break up the monopoly of the night and be construed as a possible messenger of hope. "Es war eine von jenen unheilichen Nächten", the reader learns, "wo Licht und Finsterniß schnell und seltsam mit einander abwechselten. Am Himmel flogen die Wolken, vom Winde getrieben

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153 Helmut Müller, p. 6.

154 Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 92.

155 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 108.

(...)" (I, p. 9). It is by no accident that the words used by the "Pfaff" to sway the atheist reflect the chaotic and demonic character of the storm: "Der Pfaff donnerte ihm zornig in die Seele und mahlte jezt mit Flammenzügen wie ein Verzweifelnder, und bannte den ganzen Tartarus herauf in die letzte Stunde des Sterbenden." (I, pp 12-13) As the crisis surrounding the atheist's death intensifies, so does the storm, which, by this time, no longer appears to be a meterological phenomena of any kind:

> So bliebs, bis in einzelnen ernsten Schlägen die Klocke Mitternacht ankündigte; - da führte plözlich der Sturmwind hoch oben in den Lüften die Gewitterwolke wie ein nächtliches Schreckbild herüber, und bald hatte sie ihr Grabtuch am ganzen Himmel ausgebreitet. Die Kerzen um den Sarg verlöschten, der Donner brüllte zürnend, wie eine aufrührerische Macht herunter und rief die festen Schläfer auf, und die Wolke spie Flamme auf Flamme aus, wodurch das blasse Antliz des Todten allein grell und periodisch beleuchtet wurde. (II, p. 22)

As if to remove any doubt regarding the "theological" proportions of this storm, Kreuzgang later reports: "(...) aber jezt krachte es auf einmal zusammen, wie wenn der Teufel die Oberhand erhielte" (II, p. 25). Richard Brinkmann, perhaps somewhat dryly, comments that: "Das fröstelnde Erschaudern, mit dem das Buch einsetzt, durchzieht das Ganze."[156], and Jeffrey Sammons again notes that "The storm motif appears

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156 Richard Brinkmann, pp. 10-11.

subsequently as a background to events of a demonic nature (...)."[157]

The motif does reappear, at first in conjunction with the woodcuts which detail Kreuzgang's unearthing: "die schwarzen Striche sollen die Nacht anschaulich machen und das Zikzak am Himmel einen Blitz bedeuten" (IV, p. 39), and reaches a new intensity in the tenth night-watch: "Das ist eine wunderliche Nacht;" Kreuzgang reports, "der Mondschein in den gothischen Bogen des Dohmes erscheint und verschwindet wie Geister [...]" (X, p. 121). For the first time, the reader is informed of the season and, not surprisingly, it is winter, and very cold.

> Alles ist kalt und starr und rauh, und von dem Naturtorso sind die Glieder abgefallen, und er streckt nur noch seine versteinerten Stümpfe ohne die Kränze von Blüthen und Blättern gegen den Himmel. Die Nacht ist still und fast schrecklich und der kalte Tod steht in ihr, wie ein unsichtbarer Geist, der das überwundene Leben festhält. (X, p. 121)

While mention of the seasons is infrequent in the Nachtwachen, one cannot underestimate the importance of this scene, and its role in the creation of the atmosphere for the entire novel. So Norman Brown:

> The cold is specifically depicted as a killer, but nowhere on his patrols does the watchman encounter any warmth; such things as sunshine, warmth of feeling and poetic fire are relegated to the idylls and to Kreuzgang's past.[158]

Peter Kohl echoes this sentiment, and writes: "In den

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[157] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 82.

[158] Norman Brown, p. 29.

Nachtwachen neigt eben selbst das Klima zum Extremen."[159]

How much the environment here reflects Kreuzgang's inner thought process, or vice versa, is reflected by the scene immediately following the outlandish winter scene, in which Kreuzgang allows a beggar, "ohne Dach und Fach" (X, p. 122), to freeze to death. Of this scene Jeffrey Sammons writes:

> I do not know of a single parallel to this scene in the literature of the time, in Germany or out, and I believe one would have to go far into the nineteenth century before finding a comparable example of such programmatic callousness.[160]

In this scene the reader is directly confronted with the previously discussed "demonic" ideal of nature and the equally, but diametrically opposed "demonic" reality that constitutes night in the Nachtwachen. Kreuzgang poetically reflects on the potent beauty of nature, "Doch nein, du Mutter (Nature) bist ewig treu und unveränderlich, und bietest den Kindern Früchte in dem grünen Laube das sie beschattet (...)" (X, p. 122), and decides to let the beggar die: "Er mag entschlummern!" (X, p. 122). One can only concur with Walter Hof when he writes: "Doch fehlt bei Bonaventura noch das Mitleid mit der verlassenen Kreatur (...)."[161]

At the end of the fourteenth night-watch, the storm once more manifests its importance, this time in conjunction with

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159 Peter Kohl, p. 50.

160 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 48.

161 Walter Hof, p. 406.

Kreuzgang's personal nadir, the death of Ophelia and the mutual child. The storm climaxes as an anthem of frustration, despair and loneliness, when Kreuzgang himself realizes that he has momentarily been deceived by one of the "Rollen" (XIV, p. 166) which he has, up to this time, so successfully and satirically exposed. "Es stürmte wild um das Tollhaus her (...)" (XIV, p. 168), Kreuzgang informs the reader. He is exposed by the " (...) erste Thräne, die ich weinte" (XIV, p. 170), and the wind gives vent to the inner storm brewing in the despondent protagonist: "Nahe bei mir heulte noch einer; - doch war es nur der Sturm, der durch das Tollhaus pfiff" (XIV, p. 170).

The battle between light and dark, which is characterized specifically by the motif of the storm but generally by the nocturnal atmosphere as a whole, removes all notions that one might realistically expect from the setting for a novel. "Es ist eine unechte Nacht," writes Dieter Arendt, "eine Nacht, die sich durch ein unechtes Licht selbst aufhebt."[162] The night is a frontier zone, not only between light and dark, and, "Sein oder Nichtsein" (X, p. 122), but also between good and evil, between the realm of God, and that of the Devil. "Emptiness and darkness", Norman Brown notes, "are classical images of estrangement from God (...)."[163]

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[162] Dieter Arendt, p. 512.

[163] Norman Brown, p. 37

While the night-watchman lives in the dark, however, the night does not represent, as the example of the storm demonstrates, total darkness. It is penetrated by lightning, and is vaguely illuminated by such examples as the light in the poet's window (I, p.9), the candles which surround the body of the dead atheist, (II, p. 21), and the lamp on the desk of the judge (III, pp. 30-31). "Unholier" images also provide a source of light; so, for example, the fury of the priest, who stands next to the atheist, "glühend vor Zorn" (I, p. 12), the "blaue Blize" (XVI, p. 184) present in the last night-watch, as well as the also "blue" light supposedly present at Kreuzgang's conception (XVI, p. 188).

The frontier, or buffer-zone created by the intermingling of dark with light do not indicate, however, any sign of hope or possible salvation. Rather, the stage is set for chaos, and, in an atmosphere of darkness, in which the devil usually reigns supreme, even Kreuzgang's supposed God-father seems slightly unbelievable; "(...) an der Grenze zwischen Dunkelheit und Licht scheinen Geister und Dämonen angesiedelt, scheint das Reich des Teufels zu beginnen, (...)"[164], writes Dieter Arendt. The key to this is to be found in that this is where the Devil's Kingdom begins, but Kreuzgang is shut out even from the comfort of belonging to this realm.

The theological dimensions of the night do undeniably,

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[164] Dieter Arendt, p. 513.

however, belong to the devil. Wolfgang Paulsen writes, "Auch Bonaventuras Nacht hat ihre Magie, aber es ist eine böse, schwarze Magie, in der die Gespenster, die keine Ruhe finden können, sowie Mörder und Selbstmörder umgehen."[165] While this doubtlessly demonic environment does support Brinkmann's claim that it is a "Zeitraum klarer und wacherer Erkenntnis"[166], Peter Kohl warns, by using Kreuzgang as an example, "Wer in der Nacht lebt, lebt verkehrt."[167] The milieu encountered by the night-watchman doubtlessly support this claim. On the one hand the night harbours such petty and silly criminals as the adulterers in night-watch III, on the other hand, it also harbours the misanthropic porter and his depressing bird (X, p. 125), as well as Kreuzgang's psychotic and deeply disturbing mother (XVI, p. 188). While Raimund Steinert's comment, "Dort (in the night) sucht und findet dieser einsame Tagesverächter die Gesellschaft derer, die gleich ihm die Welt hassen (..,)"[168] may perhaps seem a trifle overdone, he does manage to captivate the spirit exuded by the inhabitants of this hellish realm. "Die Nacht", so Peter Kohl, "läßt sich hier vielleicht am treffendsten als eine ökologische Nische

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165 Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 465.

166 R. Brinkmann, p. 12.

167 Peter Kohl, p. 44.

168 Raimund Steinert, p. 305.

für Misanthropen und Sonderlinge definieren."[169] The environment of the Nachtwachen, while somber, brooding and dark does undeniably contain the romantic quality of yearning.

> Unserer Auffassung nach gehört zum Begriff "Romantik" nicht nur die naive, verträumte, heile Seite, sondern genauso ihr Gegenteil, sowohl die christliche als auch die satanische Richtung, die Traumschönheit des Lebens wie die Nachtseiten, das bezaubernde Lied wie der entzaubernde "Fluch".[170]

While perhaps not in the positive sense of a Novalis, Kreuzgang does yearn to belong, even if it was to the nether world. For tempting to the nihilist this world must be. While negative, it still offers values; a series of misanthropic and desolate toe-holds, but toe-holds nonetheless. For a moment, at the end of the twelfth night-watch, Kreuzgang succeeds in becoming master over the nightly environment, and he imagines himself to be the devil:

> Es war mir, wie wenn ich mich jezt in der Nacht unter dem zugedeckten Monde, weit ausdehnte, und auf großen schwarzen Schwingen, wie der Teufel über dem Erdball schwebte. (XII, p. 148)

The key words here, however, are "Es war mir, wie wenn (...)". Kreuzgang is not the Devil, and he cannot transcend and reign over his nocturnal environment. He remains trapped, and is forced to watch over an environment on whose fringe he belongs, but which he cannot call 'home'.

> Er (Kreuzgang) weiß nichts vom Schlaf der hingebenden Ruhe; er ist verdammt zum Wachsein, zum Schauen der verborgenen Umtriebe, und seine Träume

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169 Peter Kohl, p. 46.

170 Gerhart Hoffmeister, p. 205.

> sind keine flüchtigen Gespinste, sondern massive Erscheinungen, die sein Bewußtsein bedrängen.[171]

Peter Kohl's conclusion, "Der Nachtwächter, dessen Pate der Teufel ist, wurde durch den Bund bei seiner Zeugung in den Kreis der Mächte der Finsternis aufgenommen, und kann die Nacht als angestammte Heimat betrachten, seine einzige auf dieser Welt"[172] is, therefore, essentially not quite correct. Kreuzgang's conception in the presence of the Devil has made him a relative of the creatures of the night, but Kreuzgang is not, and this is important[173], a blood relative of the Devil. He is, so to speak, a relative by 'marriage', and not by birth, and so he does not directly belong to, and descend from, this family. He is, and must remain, which is even more horrible, an outsider in his own 'family'.

With regard to Kreuzgang, the environment of the night is doubly demonic, for not only is the night - the realm of Satan and the Devil's playground - it is also the "luziferisches Element"[174], to which Kreuzgang is necessarily sympathetic, but unable to belong. Kreuzgang resides in the negative, but thoroughly modern demonic chaos on the fringe of the night, in the gap between little light and much

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171 Helmut Müller, p. 7.

172 Peter Kohl, pp. 45-46.

173 Please see Chapter 6 for the elaboration on this idea.

174 Peter Kohl, p. 46.

darkness, in short, his real environment and home is the "Nichts" (XVI, p. 199), by which he is continually confronted.

6. The Devil

6.1 The Role of the Devil in the 'Nachtwachen'

The most important character in the Nachtwachen, besides Kreuzgang himself, is probably the figure of the Devil. Appearing in almost every one of the nightly vigils, in total no less than 17 times[175], the Devil is characterized by his elusive quality, as it becomes increasingly difficult to pinpoint his function with regard to the text throughout which he wanders like a ghostly shadow. Inconsistency, therefore, appears to be his main trademark. "Zudem ist das Erscheinungsbild des Teuflischen in den Nachtwachen alles andere als eindeutig."[176] This, however, should not appear at all surprising, as the Devil does not actually put in an appearance in the text. He is alluded to, and frequently mentioned, but it is only in the last night-watch that he directly puts in an appearance, and even in this regard, the narrator does not meet him in 'person'.

While at first confusing, this inconsistency takes on a

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[175] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 81.

[176] Jörg Schönert: "Fragen ohne Antwort. Zur Krise der literarischen Aufklärung im Roman des späten 18. Jahrhunderts. Wezels Belphegor, Klingers Faust und die Nachtwachen von Bonaventura." Jahrbuch der Schillergesellschaft 14 (1970). p. 214.

certain logic when applied to the Nachtwachen as a whole. In a world in which the protagonist has, quite early on, blasted open the spiritual horizons which have encompassed the intellectual and spiritual boundaries of his time, the Devil, both as an independent 'spirit' and as the antipode, the 'Gegenspieler', to a God in the Christian sense, becomes a little less believable. Kreuzgang is quite willing to admit that he does not quite believe in a Devil in the Christian sense: "denn ich hatte", he remarks, "bis jezt nur an einen poetischen Teufel geglaubt, keinesweges aber an den wirklichen" (III, p. 28). And yet, Kreuzgang does seem to espouse the concept of a Devil, a fact that is not only reinforced by the frequent allusions to the Devil, but also by the manner in which he continually infers the Devil's name; "Beim Teufel" (IX, p. 114) to him is not only an expression, but an exclamation which underscores, in the same manner in which many a Christian uses the Lord's name in vain, the force to which his belief oscillates. But, using the Lord's or the Devil's name in vain does not immediately connote a conscious sin. Rather, it indicates an affront to a concept, in which one may or may not completely believe, but which was, at one point or other, dominant enough to warrant 'sinning' against.

> The degree of psychological and material plausability of the events throughout the Nachtwachen is rather low. But they do not partake of the supernatural. The frequent references to the

> Devil, for instance, are allegorical glosses upon the action and not events in themselves.[177]

The Devil, therefore, has become less individualized and more conceptualized; he is an attitude, rather than a spirit with a recognizable countenance. As such, he is not only a character or a motif, he becomes a cornerstone for the entire framework of the novel, as Wolfgang Paulsen notes in one of his footnotes: "Aber auch Sammons noch nimmt den Teufel nur als Motiv, während er doch ein Strukturelement ist."[178]

This 'attitude' which characterizes Bonaventura's Devil does, however, incorporate many of the classical features of the Devil of bygone days. Evil, destruction and negativity are the Devil's domain, and in these personality traits the novel abounds. The Devil, no matter how vague the image, does provide a convenient and well known focal point around which these characteristics center. An individual such as Kreuzgang, who has succeeded in overthrowing and exposing the dogma of his day, has not necessarily attained a level at which he can overthrow the entire superstructure of which he himself is an element. The Devil, already the focal point for the negativity surrounding the protagonist, allows him to transcend the negative values he encounters in reality, and provides him with the means to express these same values in the form of an

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[177] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 77.

[178] Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 507. This important conclusion, so briefly addressed by Paulsen, is located in footnote 63 on the abovementioned page.

absolute, which, due to its religious and moral character, manifests itself in the character of the Devil. The Devil, in short, represents Evil on a mythological plane, a plane which, due to the night-watchman's upbringing and heritage, he is accustomed to and required to consider in any model which might serve as a basis for his world view. "Der Teufel ist, wie der Tod, eine Gestalt in den Nachtwachen, die immer wieder mythisch gesehen wird."[179]

The text itself, the reader must note, supports this claim. Kreuzgang himself is frequently caught in a struggle between the ideal and reality. Focussing on the ideal, he is confronted by reality, which does not stand up to the ideal he imagines. The lack of ideals and absolutes in his time lead to what Kreuzgang regards as the colourless and meaningless character of his own time. Nowhere is this loss of the ideal more apparent than in the Devil. The protagonist refers to the drama of his day to make his point:

> Was den poetischen [Teufel] anbetrifft, so ist es gewiß sehr schade, daß man ihn jezt so äußerst vernachlässiget, und statt eines absolut bösen Prinzips, lieber die Tugendhaften Bösewichter, in Ifland- und Kotzebuescher Manier, vorzieht, in denen der Teufel vermenschlicht, und der Mensch verteufelt erscheint. In einem schwankenden Zeitalter scheut man alles Absolute und Selbstständige [...]. (III, p. 28)

Kreuzgang reacts to the lack of ideals by creating his own ideal. The Devil, who represents an idealized version of the

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[179] Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 85.

negativity of Kreuzgang's world, is the result of this process, and it is with a certain degree of pride that Kreuzgang can manage to retain this ideal even when he has successfully questioned and degraded most of the other ideals of his time.

The Devil also has another function in the Nachtwachen. He, more than any other force, aids Kreuzgang in unmasking the world around him. In this manner, the Nachtwachen at first appear to echo the sentiments of Goethe's Faust. Parallels between the two works exist, and, ironically, the parallels appear to reinforce each other principally in the figure of the Devil, as Wolfgang Paulsen, in particular, has noted:

> Nicht mehr über den Teufel stolpern wir hier [VII, p. 84], sondern über die Meerkatze und haben den Eindruck, daß diese auf direktem Wege aus Goethes Hexenküche bezogen sein muß - wie natürlich auch der "Erdgeist", [XVI, p. 188] in dessen Zeichen sich der Alchimist und die Zigeunerin in der Beschwörungsszene berührten, eindeutig auf eine nachgoethische Gestaltung des Teufels weist.[180]

That these two particular episodes appear similar, and thus seem to indicate a reflection of Goethe by Bonaventura, is, however, a somewhat hasty conclusion. Not only were the Nachtwachen (1805) published before Goethe's Faust (1808[181], 1832), thus making it impossible for Bonaventura to rely upon

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[180] Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 509.

[181] While Klingemann, or more precisely 'Bonaventura' could not have used the completed first half of Goethe's Faust, he could have had access to Goethe's Faust fragment. Even the uncompleted Faust, however, differs vastly, both in concept and in intention, from Bonaventura's Nachtwachen.

Goethe, but the conclusions arrived at by the two writers is completely different. Goethe's 'Faust'-character does exist within the religious framework, in which both God and the Devil remain tangible realities. While at times strained, Goethe's work does forcibly hold together the religious superstructure of the time, thus enabling Faust to be, at the end, saved from the clutches of a jubilant Mephisto. Bonaventura makes no such compromises. His protagonist not only deals with, but also helps to destroy the 'harmony of the spheres' and, as a result, Kreuzgang can neither be saved nor damned at the end of the novel. If nothing else, the hasty conclusion arrived at by Paulsen only helps to support Schillemeit's conclusions, which establish Klingemann as the author of the Nachtwachen, as the writer of the Nachtwachen was obviously well aware not only of Goethe, but of the work Goethe was creating, a work which Klingemann would be the first to produce and direct on stage[182].

It is in the manner in which the concept of the Devil is employed, however, in which there is some similarity between the two works. Though arriving at totally different conclusions, and representing the figure of the Devil in completely different manners, the Devil in both works serves as a force which supports, indirectly, the enlightenment, in Goethe's case, and the 'unmasking', in Bonaventura's case, of

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[182] The date for Klingemann's staging of Faust is 1829. (Nachtwachen, p. ii.)

the world in which the protagonist moves. Again, there are differences. Mephisto, "der Geist, der stets verneint"[183], by attempting to destroy, succeeds only in perpetrating the Creator's ultimate goals[184]. In Bonaventura's example, the Devil actually does help to 'enlighten', in pessimistic fashion, the protagonist, but no greater scheme on the part of any God can be found to exist which might counteract the influence of the Devil. In the idea that the Devil serves to enlighten the protagonist, the critics generally seem to be in agreement. Gerhart Hoffmeister, for example, notes: "Der Teufel hat allerdings nicht nur unmenschliche Züge, sondern steht wie Kreuzgang selbst im Dienste der Disillusionierung und Aufklärung."[185] Walter Pfannkuche, in a more recent work, arrives at the same conclusion:

> Wo Gott den Menschen täuscht, muß der Teufel ihm zur Wahrheit verhelfen - der perversio dei entspricht die Erhebung des Teufels. Der Teufel ist also der Anwalt des Determinationsdenkens, damit eine Emanantion des Nachtwächters, und er ist dabei guter Dinge, eine angenehme Erscheinung, ein Überwinder des verzweifelten Hasses - amor fati.[186]

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[183] Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil. Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 1986. p. 39. Line 1338.

[184] In Goethe's Faust the Devil himself concretely outlines his function in Creation. When asked by Faust, Mephistopheles replies that he is, "Ein Teil von jener Kraft,/ Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft." (lines 1335-1336). Faust, p. 39. No such outline for the role of the Devil is given in Bonaventura's Nachtwachen.

[185] Gerhart Hoffmeister, p. 203.

[186] Walter Pfannkuche, p. 50.

It is Jeffrey Sammons, however, who most succinctly outlines both how the Devil functions as a positive, enlightening force on the night-watchman, and where in the text this influence can best be detected:

> For Bonaventura the Devil represents both the aura of evil which broods over his chaotic universe and an instrument for the revelation of the stark truth. That these two functions are not necessarily in contradiction illustrates what can fairly be called the radical pessimism of the work. We have seen how the Devil is a symbol of Evil in the opening night-watches [I-III, see chapter 1]. But when the watchman wishes he were the Devil in order to be able to deliver an even more scathing indictment on the night of his "Last Judgement" [VI], or calls forth a vision of the Devil hovering over the world and laughing at mankind stripped of its various cosmetic disguises [XII], or asserts that the Devil has invented laughter to lay bare the contemptible core of the world [XV], we begin to feel that the Devil is a representative of truth in opposition to the deception which God has perpetrated upon the world.[187]

The Devil, therefore, acts not only as the absolute 'negator' in Creation, but also as an enlightener, who attempts to detail, in no uncertain terms, the realistic state of both man and world. Undoubtably, the Devil does, in this manner, portray a certain grotesque characteristic in a progress-oriented society. Man apparently values enlightenment - even in the negative sense - over ignorance, and by indirectly supporting enlightenment, the Devil portrays a deceivingly positive characteristic. "Als böses Prinzip, das jede Gestalt annehmen kann, ist er [der Teufel] die groteske

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[187] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 85.

Gestalt schlechthin [...]."[188] When viewed from this aspect, which is the case with Kreuzgang, who sees in the Devil a cautious ally, it should come as no wonder that the Devil does portray a sometimes sympathetic personality, and that the protagonist seizes here on a comforting, almost friendly spirit, who, like himself shows mankind the circumstances as they really are.

Understated and hypothetical as it may be, there is one final role which the Devil, or so Boanventura seems to suggest, can play in the Nachtwachen. Repeatedly, the text details an absence of God. If the monologue of the 'wahnsinniger Weltschöpfer' [IX, pp. 115-116] should serve as any indication, then God has tired of the world and of the preposterous, arrogant species he has chosen to populate it, and has retreated from the world entirely. The Devil, the novel seems to imply, has not chosen this alternative. If God has vacated the battlefield, however, while his antagonist has not, it is only natural to assume that the Devil is controlling the world, and that he, rather than God, is the director of the spiritual drama as detailed by the Nachtwachen. "Naheliegend ist eine vorschnelle Antwort: Der Direktor ist der Teufel. Fast in jeder Nachtwache erscheint irgendwo das Motiv des Teufels, sich mehr und mehr

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[188] Peter Kohl, p. 149.

steigernd."[189] While perhaps somewhat simplified, this configuration would apply to any theological statement made by the novel:

> Indessen wäre es eine lässige Vereinfachung des Problems, den Teufel für den Drahtzieher im Marionettenspiel zu halten. Er ist Gegenspieler des Schöpfers, eines Schöpfers aber, der ein schlechter Dichter ist und - wenn der Monolog des wahnsinnigen Weltschöpfers gleichnishaft zu verstehen ist - wirren Geistes zu werden droht. Seine Allmacht ist Ohnmacht.[190]

One might even go so far as to speculate that Kreuzgang is the mere agent of the Devil, who is the director of the puppet play in which he himself is but a mere mariohette. If Kreuzgang can be regarded as a satirist in the course of the novel, then the Devil is the ultimate satirist, unmasking and satirizing not only Creation, but satirizing also the individual who does his bidding. The Devil, in this role, becomes Bonaventura's equal. "Der Teufel [wird] mit dem Satiriker [Bonaventura] gleichgesetzt [...]."[191]

The role of the Devil, then, is threefold in the Nachtwachen. He is, first and foremost, the incarnation of Kreuzgang's need to idealize, to find some absolute which he can use to orient himself in a mediocre, but also rudderless world. Furthermore, the Devil, as an unmasker, like the protagonist himself, helps to dissipate the cosmetic illusions

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189 Dieter Arendt, p. 520.

190 Dieter Arendt, p. 521.

191 Jörg Schönert, p. 215.

which cover the meaningless foundations of man and society. Finally, the Devil is also the last player on a theological stage which God seems to have deserted. While chaos, which envelops the world of the Nachtwachen, does not necessarily have to be negative, in this case, as the Devil's influence on Kreuzgang's spiritual spectrum is not countered, it exhibits negative, disillusioning and pessimistic tendencies. "Zwar kann bei Schlegel das Chaos durchaus positiv sein, aber es darf nicht verwundern, daß der Teufel sich den negativen Aspekt heraussucht."[192]

6.2 Laughter: The Devil's Revenge

The saying that 'laughter is the best medicine' takes on an entirely new meaning when applied to the Nachtwachen. With increasing intensity and visciousness, laughter becomes Kreuzgang's last resort; his defense against a world whose every aspect and facet he has annihilated: "Laughter proves not to be a corrective instrument, but a defense against meaninglessness, a mask over an abyss."[193] It is the weapon of

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[192] Andreas Mielke: "Überlegungen zu "Des Teufels Taschenbuch" von Bonaventura und Schlegels Begriff der diabolischen Dichtkunst." Aurora. Jahrbuch der Eichendorff-Gesellschaft 39 (1979). p. 198. Mielke demonstrates, using Schlegel's theoretical concept of the "diabolische Dichtkunst" (Lyceumsfragment 30/ Athenäumsfragment 379) as an example that Bonaventura may, in fact, be attempting to practically carry out Schlegel's theoretical notions. Please see Mielke, p. 199.

[193] Gerald Gillespie, Introduction. Nachtwachen, p. 7.

the satirist, whose parodies and scorn result in ostracism, which becomes palatable only if it is exposed to the humour of one who admonishes. It is the expression of the outsider, who always laughs at somebody, and never with the objects of his derision. A "[...] trapeze pattern [...]"[194] of laughter emerges, in which the protagonist uses his laughter as a perch to keep him aloft in a world which continually threatens to envelop him.

From the beginning, the reader becomes acquainted with the watchman's laughter. Kreuzgang continually associates himself with the 'Hanswurst', a supposedly comical figure who, in this novel, portrays no characteristics that can be deemed 'humourous' in any conventional sense. The Hanswurst exposes the world, reduces what he finds to humour and laughs. The world is a stage in the Nachtwachen, but the drama being played out is a grim, grotesque and painful comedy, which is only 'funny' because the humour results from misunderstood tragedy. As Kreuzgang himself writes: "Was beim Teufel, ist auch diese ganze Erde, nebst ihrem empfindsamen Begleiter dem Monde, anders werth als sie auszulachen - ja sie hat allein darum noch einigen Werth weil das Lachen auf ihr zu Hause ist" (XV, p. 174).

Consequently, however, both the Hanswurst and the night-watchman become objects of derision and humour during the

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[194] Russel Neuswanger: "On Laughter in Bonaventuras Nachtwachen." German Life and Letters 30 (1976/77). p. 17.

course of the novel. The "moralischer und ernsthafter Narr" (IV, p. 51) is laughed at by a vain and stupid world, whose culture is characterized by individuals who laugh both at the watchman and at his attempts. This, the satirizing of the satirist, becomes obvious in more than one scenario. In the twelfth night-watch, Kreuzgang attempts to prevent a young man from committing suicide, only to find that the individual whose life he is attempting to save is an actor, whose 'suicide' is merely an act for the stage (XII, pp. 147-148). By the end of the fourteenth night-watch, all of Kreuzgang's attempts to find any sort of meaning have failed, and the protagonist has effectively been reduced to silence. He has attempted to love, and his own emotional attempts have been unmasked as an illusion.

> Ich weiß gewiß, der böse Feind [who else but the Devil!] schwebt hohnlachend über der Erde, und hat die Liebe, als eine bezaubernde Maske, auf sie herabgeworfen, um die sich jezt alle Menschenkinder reißen, sie auf eine Minute lang vorzuhalten. Sieh, auch ich habe sie leider gefaßt [...]. (XIV, p. 163)

Finally, Hanswurst, his beloved accomplice, is confiscated by the state. In each scenario, Kreuzgang is increasingly unmasked as the 'fool', and it is the world which laughs.

It is not surprising, therefore, that it is the Devil who stands behind Kreuzgang's laughter, and that it is the Devil who is the ultimate joker in Bonaventura's world. In order to revenge himself on God, the Devil gave mankind laughter as an apparent tool to master the frustrations of his existence, but also as a means to parody and satirize Creation:

> Es war alles auf ihr [der Welt] so empfindsam und gut eingerichtet, daß es dem Teufel, der sie einst zum Zeitvertreibe sich beschaute, zum Ärger gereichte; um sich an dem Werkmeister zu rächen, schickte er das Gelächter ab, und es wußte sich geschickt und unbemerkt in der Maske der Freude einzuschleichen [...]. (XV, p. 174)

By laughing, mankind can objectively dismiss the desperate situation he is in, and so ease his misery in the world. "It [laughter] is given to mankind as a reaction of doubt in the face of absurd facts."[195] Laughter offers a refuge and haven as the individual laughing is, for the moment, himself immune from being laughed at, and has succeeded in safeguarding himself from exposure. "In other words, by making use of the defense of laughter, one can, as it were, put himself on the side of the Devil and thus avoid the danger of falling victim to illusion."[196]

That it is the Devil who is responsible for and who has the most to gain from this type of laughter is obvious. Through satire, laughter and ridicule, Creation is devalued and becomes vulnerable to an attack against which there is no effective defense. Laughter becomes a weapon of annihilation. It is in this respect that Keuzgang views himself as the Devil's kinsman and servant who, through laughter, does the Devil's bidding and who, again like the Devil, uses laughter as a weapon to destroy the world which seeks to ostracize him.

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195 Gerald Gillespie: Introduction. Nachtwachen, p. 26.

196 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 86.

> Like his infernal Sponsor, he is a spirit who always negates - and their laughter is even more alike than their appearance. In his own sense, Kreuzgang will become a "Humorist" full of senseless despair, who laughs, like his parents and especially the Devil, both in spite of his existential condition and because of it.[197]

Kreuzgang's last remaining comfort is that as long as he can laugh, he is safe. "Laßt mir nur das Lachen mein lebelang, und ich halte es hier unten aus!" (XV, p. 174)

Unfortunately, however, even Kreuzgang does not fully realize just how diabolical his supposed master really is. The scenarios in which Kreuzgang himself becomes a victim of deception and becomes, in his own estimation, a figure of ridicule prove that the 'scorner' himself is by no means, invulnerable. True to his character, the Devil betrays even his ally, and Kreuzgang finds himself exposed more and more to a laughter which does not eminate from him and which he cannot control. Ultimately, Kreuzgang finds himself satirized not by a person, but by a force, namely the 'Nichts'.

> Without himself, perhaps, being amused, Bonaventura has shaped the book in such a way as to make the narrator on his own terms the most ridiculous thing in the ridiculous Universe, until finally, as we ventured to suggest, even Nothingness laughs at him -- while his own laughter sticks in his throat just when he needs it most.[198]

Even Kreuzgang's ability to laugh has, by the last night

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[197] Russel Neuswanger, p. 17.

[198] Russel Neuswanger: Investigation of some Central Motifs in "Die Nachtwachen des Bonaventura". Diss., Ohio State University, 1970. p. 180.

watch, been eroded and destroyed. The 'Devil', so to speak, has triumphed over his own creation and has reduced him to permanent silence. "[...] if laughter has become a weapon of universal annihilation, then by the end the laughter itself has been destroyed, shown empty, discredited as a response to reality."[199] The echo which Kreuzgang encounters at the end of the book (XVI, p. 199) has a distinctly mocking character, and Kreuzgang finds himself, at the moment when he is most vulnerable, duped once again. Ironically, the echo, as the reader has learned beforehand, is also a creation of the Devil (XVI, p. 186), proving that even this, the defense of last resort, was a mere sham.

No other force, the Nachtwachen prove, portrays as devilish a set of characteristics as laughter. Appearing, at first, as a weapon of self defense, it proves to be vicious and unpredictable, capable of mortally wounding both subject and object. If the nothingness which stands behind every exposed mask in the Nachtwachen is also a product of the Devil, be he real or allegorical, then laughter is indeed his most formidable weapon, useful in negating everything, and, finally, negating even itself. It is the ultimate revenge, displaying both destructive and diabolical tendencies, and is a key element in the destruction of any and all components of Creation.

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199 Russel Neuswanger, Central Motifs, p. 174.

6.3 The Devil and the Family: Kreuzgang's Heritage

Not uncommon in Romantic literature is the theme of the unknown heritage, and the quest of the protagonist to discover his own origins. This theme is also present in the Nachtwachen, where Kreuzgang, a foundling, seeks to discover his own roots, and perhaps through this discovery find a basis for his own existence. The reader thus becomes Kreuzgang's accomplice, in the course of the novel, and helps the protagonist to unravel the mystery of his past. That Kreuzgang's origins are mysterious becomes apparent by the fourth night-watch, when the night-watchman leafs through the series of woodcuts which form his known past. A shoemaker, searching for treasure, uncovers instead the infant Kreuzgang:

> Es ging alles in Ordnung; ich hob die Truhe die ich im Traume gesehen, besann mich zuvor, ob ich wirklich wachte, und öffnete sie dann; aber statt des Goldes was ich erwartete, hatte ich dieses Wunderkind aus der Erde gehoben. (IV, p. 42)

By the sixteenth night-watch, the 'Wunderkind' that becomes the narrator of the book, has succeeded in devaluing every aspect of his life, and appears to have exhausted every avenue of hope left to him. It is at this moment that he 'rediscovers' his mother. She reveals to him his origins, and introduces him to his father:

> Ich schauderte heute zum erstenmale etwas, denn das Weib las aus meiner Hand mein ganzes voriges Leben,

> wie aus einem Buche mir vor, bis hin zu dem Augenblicke, wo ich als ein Schaz gehoben wurde. Darauf sagte sie: "Sollst auch deinen Vater sehen, Blanker; schau dich um, er steht hinter dir!" - Ich wandte mich rasch - und der ernste steinerne Kopf des Alchymisten blickte mich starr an. Sie legte die Hand auf ihn, und sagte sonderbar lächelnd: "Der ist's! und ich bin die Mutter!" (XVI, p. 187)

Kreuzgang is thus introduced to the strange story which forms the background to his birth. Kreuzgang learns that the Devil played an intregal part not only in his life, but also in his conception. Both father and mother, it seems, were engaged in the process of conjuring up the Devil. "'Es war in der Christnacht, als dein Vater den Teufel bannen wollte [...]" (XVI, p. 188). Reality, in the accepted sense, has clearly been left behind: "unter dem Boden lief es hin, wie wenn die Erde Wellen schlüge, und das Licht brannte blau" (XVI, p. 188). The blue light seems especially indicative of the presence of evil spirits. "Blaues Licht war jedoch, altem Aberglauben gemäß, ein Zeichen für die Anwesenheit böser Geister."[200] The place is reached, in the ritual, where the conjurers change their allegiance from God to the Devil. "Wir hielten jezt an der Stelle, wo dem Himmel entsagt und der Hölle geschworen wird [...]" (XVI, p. 188). After so doing, the two become involved with one another, and forget about the Devil, who, having been called, is present at the 'unholy' love-scene: "Als der Teufel erschien, erblickten wir ihn nur noch mit halb geöffneten Augen -es war gerade der Moment in

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[200] Linde Katritzky, p. 166.

dem du enstandest!" (XVI, p. 188). The Devil, humoured by the pathetic scene, offers to act as the future child's Godfather. "Jener [the Devil] war recht bei Laune und erbot sich Pathenstelle zu vertreten [...]" (XVI, p. 188).

These dubious circumstances, then, form the basis for Kreuzgang's origins and birth. Conceived in the presence of the Devil, the Devil also indirectly becomes his relative, and so the individual already born under the Devil's influence also becomes a member of his unholy family. This relationship to the force which Kreuzgang has always regarded as his sponsor on the one hand seems to provide an answer to many of the questions posed by the text, raises, on the other hand, however, a series of new questions. Several critics have beeen quick to point out that Kreuzgang's heritage symbolically reveals the point of view from which the protagonist reasons. Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, for example, writes: "Wenn der Nachtwächter den Teufel zum Paten hat, ist dann nicht auch seine Perpektive von seiner Herkunft bestimmt?"[201] Jörg Schönert also raises the question of Kreuzgang's perspective, and arrives at the same answer: "Kommt man vom Ende der Erzählung her, vom Enthüllen der Zeugung Kreuzgangs, läge es nahe, ihn als Vertreter der 'Teufelsperspektive' [...]

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[201] Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 85.

anzusehen."[202] Both of these conclusions, however, tend to oversimplify the issue of Kreuzgang's perspective. While it is correct, as Jeffrey Sammons judges, that "[...] the watchman's parentage [...] explains [...] not events, but attitudes [...]"[203], it is much too convenient to simply write off the night-watchman's attitude as one originating from the Devil. While doubtlessly influenced by his relative, Kreuzgang's perspective is too original to be attributed merely to the powers of evil, and the implication in such statements is to disregard the importance of Kreuzgang's messages. If the Devil is responsible for Kreuzgang's logic, one might argue, then the Devil has also helped to formulate Kreuzgang's conclusions. As these are the products of diabolically slanted evil, they should, for the good of mankind, simply be disregarded as ingenious gibberish.

This, however, is not the case. Bonaventura has discreetly allowed the Devil to play an indirect but important role in Kreuzgang's heritage, the prime focus of which is to tie the influence of the Devil and the forces of evil into Kreuzgang's own psyche. The tempting question arises as to who Kreuzgang's actual father is - was it the Alchymist or was it perhaps the Devil: "[...] war der Teufel nun der Pate gewesen

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202 Jörg Schönert: "Fragen ohne Antwort. Zur Krise der literarischen Aufklärung im Roman des späten 18. Jahrhunderts. Wezels Belphegor, Klingers Faust und die Nachtwachen von Bonaventura." Jahrbuch der Schillergesellschaft 14 (1970). p. 214.

203 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 110.

oder der Vater?"[204] The answer, while not explicit in the text is that the Devil is not the protagonist's father. If we are to lend any credence to Kreuzgang as a character, the narrator cannot have a father in whom he himself cannot believe (III, p. 28). Furthermore, as the Devil's son, Kreuzgang would gain the very foothold, the security, which the Nachtwachen deny him. The protagonist is, as the text repeatedly depicts, doomed to confront the 'Nichts'repeatedly, yet if Kreuzgang were the Devil's child, this threat would be removed. The values and beliefs which Kreuzgang has already exposed would, as a result, gain a new form of validity.

As Kreuzgang's god-father, however, the Devil is allowed to play his true role in Kreuzgang's world view. He influences Kreuzgang's perceptions and opinions and, as such, poses as exactly what he later turns out to be, in the form of Godfather, namely a form of sinister sponsor and silent benefactor for the protagonist. Kreuzgang is not his spokesman, but in the Devil he finds a form of patron, who provides him a foothold and gives him shelter where no other person or philosophy will. Kreuzgang acts, as Peter Kohl summarizes, in the "[...] ambivalenten Funktion seines Paten, als Verkörperer des Bösen und dessen Entlarver."[205] While any influence presented by the Devil may necessarily be 'evil' in

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[204] Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 506.

[205] Peter Kohl, p. 118.

nature, it also has the quality of influencing Kreuzgang in the unmasking of the hypocrisy in the world which surrounds him. As such, the 'negative' influence of the Devil is offset by the positive quality which forms the basis for Kreuzgang's character, namely his unerring quest for the true nature of things, which incorporates the Devil's perspective as a part of Creation which cannot be overlooked if any substantial answers are to be forthcoming. Kreuzgang's perspectives, then, are not those of the Devil, they are, much more accurately, 'devilish' in their chaotic character, as they inevitably seem to terminate in destruction.

Having the Devil as Godfather also introduces an allegorical and symbolic dimension both to Kreuzgang's heritage and to the role of the protagonist in the book as a whole. The spiritual plane, crucial to the Nachtwachen, is here combined with the existential plane, on which the night-watchman has been operating. While denying religion, society, art and nature, Kreuzgang has yet to commit himself to any spiritual force, and through the discovery of his heritage, coupled with his continuing empathy for the Devil, the stage is set for him to commmit himself spiritually. Kreuzgang submits himself to the Devil, much like his father before him, and recognizes his 'Godfather' as the last remaining possible saviour. Not only would his family ties to the Devil provide convenient answers to his own dilemmas, it would also help to justify his misanthropic tendencies. "[...] in der Patenschaft

des Teufels erweist sich seine Prädestination zum-Misanthropen und Blasphemiker."[206]

In the Nachtwachen, the final drama serves to eradicate the final possibilities left open to the night-watchman. He has, at the same time, discovered his family as well as a spiritual 'protector.' The two discoveries, linked by the Devil, prove to be Kreuzgang's last hope in avoiding the 'Nichts'. As with every other belief in the Nachtwachen, however, Kreuzgang is doomed to failure here as well. He meddles with the existing circumstances as they are, and finds that, without wanting to, he exposes his last hope also as a mask. Key to the final scene in the novel is Kreuzgang's father, who, even in death seems to hold off the 'Nichts'. "[...] und der alte Schwarzkünstler schien dem Nichts Trotz bieten zu wollen" (XVI, p.196). In so doing, the alchemist, in his perfectly preserved state, appears as some kind of metaphysical exception to all of the cosmic laws, and reaffirms the existence of a spiritual order, one which has always eluded his son. Some critics even go so far as to view this father as the substitute for God: "Der Vater ist hier mehr als der einzige Mensch. Im Hintergrund steht der christliche Bezug auf den Vater."[207] If this were the case, the critics go on to postulate, then the final scene, would serve

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206 Peter Kohl, p. 81.

207 Dorothee Solle-Nipperdey, p. 90.

as an allegory for the spiritual world of mankind:

> Denkt man sich dazu den Alchimisten als eine Art Gottvatergestalt, dann wird die geschilderte Liebesnacht zur Vereinigung von Gott, Natur und Teufel, und die Nachtwachen werden zur Menschheitsallegorie schlechthin.[208]

Unfortunately, this line of argumentation runs into difficulty. The alchimist serves as a God-like model for his son, at least for several moments, but it seems somewhat far-fetched to regard an individual, who, like Faust, has enlisted the power of the Devil, as a God-like character. It is much more reasonable to presume that the figure of the alchimist serves as a model of the spiritual order which Kreuzgang has questioned and negated. The alchemist's attempt at conjuring up the Devil proves that the spiritual boundaries at that particular moment in time still applied. An individual who conjures up the Devil negates God, in the process, however, reaffirming his belief both in God and in the Devil. Kreuzgang, through his father, is making a final attempt to reintegrate himself into the spiritual spectrum well-known to him, allying himself, as had his father, with the Devil rather than with God. The father's preserved state appears, in this regard, as proof for the existence of the spiritual plane which Kreuzgang seeks to re-adopt.

In his zeal, however, Kreuzgang destroys the very vision he is seeking to uphold. He notes that the father has, in

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[208] Peter Kohl, p. 81.

death, been forced to conform to the religious social norms of the day. His hands have been folded in prayer, and society has forced its own status on the 'spiritual' outsider who had allied himself with the Christian antipode to God. "Nur haben sie ihm nachher die Hände gefaltet, daß er hier unten wider Willen beten muß!" (XVI, p. 196). Both as the Devils' 'God-son', and because society has attempted to force its own standards upon his father, Kreuzgang reacts with anger: "'Und warum betet er denn?' fragte ich zornig [...]" (XVI, p. 196). True to both his character and his new spiritual ally, Kreuzgang forces the praying hands of his father apart: "[...] ich reiße dir die Hände mit Gewalt auseinander!" (XVI, p. 198)

The result of this action shatters what remains of Kreuzgang's attempt to find a meaning to the universe and to the life he has been leading. His 'father' disintegrates into dust, and Kreuzgang realizes that he has, once again, been duped.

> Wehe! Was ist das - bist auch du nur eine Maske und betrügst mich? - Ich sehe dich nicht mehr Vater - wo bist du? Bei der Berührung zerfällt alles in Asche, und nur auf dem Boden liegt noch eine Handvoll Staub, und ein paar genährte Würmer schleichen sich heimlich weg, wie moralische Leichenredner, die sich beim Trauermahle übernommen haben. Ich streue diese Handvoll väterlichen Staub in die Lufte und es bleibt - Nichts! (XVI, p. 198)

By symbolically separating the father's praying hands, Kreuzgang has also symbolically destroyed the foundation for the precarious spiritual system he has been seeking to uphold. "Damit bricht der letzte titanische Aufschwung des

Nachtwächters, der letzte Versuch, Sinn hinter dem Unsinn zu finden, vollständig zusammen."[209] The prayer of the father, whether the alchemist is a disciple of God or the Devil, is important in that it depicts the harmony of a spiritual order that Kreuzgang, through his attempts, has now completely destroyed.

> Solange er [der Alchemist] noch betet, das heißt, solange er sich noch auf etwas außer sich bezieht, verbleibt ihm vermittels dieser Beziehung eine Bestimmtheit. Sobald aber diese Beziehung zugunsten der reinen Eigenmächtigkeit des Subjekts aufgegeben werden soll, fällt er [Kreuzgang] dem Nichts anheim.[210]

Meager and short lived though it was, Kreuzgang had attempted to create a sort of spiritual haven in which the outsider (and it must be considered that all members of Kreuzgang's family, including the 'Devil', are outsiders) could integrate himself outside of the norms of the society he had already rejected. Simply because he had rejected the existing system in the existing parameters does not mean that Kreuzgang does not feel the same needs as every other human being and, even though he has effectively destroyed the spiritual constellation as he finds it, he is just as prone to the hopes and fears concerning the afterlife as is everyone else. "Despite his critical stance in relation to the notion of immortality,

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209 Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 89.

210 Walter Pfannkuche, p. 82.

Kreuzgang is by no means immune to the human tendency to construct a vision of life after death."[211]

The end of the novel depicts the end of even this, the compromised version of Kreuzgang's attempt to find a spiritual foothold to which he can retreat, alienated as he is. Even his allegience to the Devil, his Godfather, turns out to be an illusion. Either the Devil refuses, much like God before him, to help the protagonist, or, as is much more likely, he is in no position to do so. There is, as Kreuzgang discovers, no alternative, and a spiritual haven, from which to ward off the 'Nichts', no longer exists.

> That is the point in this graveyard Vigil: we watch even the dead dying a little more, decaying a little more -- but we see no trace of a resurrection.[212]

The Devil is instrumental to the final conundrum in which Kreuzgang finds himself. The night-watchman, a "devilish Lazarus"[213], has always believed he could find at least some comfort, both physically and spiritually, in the discovery of his roots. Kreuzgang's final hope, however, has been shattered. "Die Heimatsuche führte in die Heimatlosigkeit."[214] The quest for his heritage has proved itself to be another of the devilish/demonic self-defeating processes that riddle the

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[211] Kathy Brzovic, p. 394.

[212] Russel Neuswanger, Central Motifs, p. 91.

[213] Russel Neuswanger, "On Laughter [...]", p. 17.

[214] Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 85.

Nachtwachen. The Devil, Kreuzgang's sponsor and Godfather, must be, as Kreuzgang lacks any other structured theological or philosophical model to fall back on, held responsible for the doubting that has devastated every value in the novel. The original doubter and rebel, the Devil naturally is Kreuzgang's patron, a fact reinforced by the last Vigil. It is precisely doubt and rebellion, however, which have destroyed Kreuzgang's ability to find comfort from his Godfather when he needs it most.

6.4 Kreuzgang and the Devil

When dealing with Kreuzgang, both as an individual and as a concept, the protagonist's character becomes highly questionable. While he is indirectly and symbolically linked to the Devil, one of the central questions of the work must be to what extent Kreuzgang is himself a 'real' character. The reader learns little about Kreuzgang's upbringing, and, as a character, the protagonist spends most of his time reacting to events, shielding his individuality both from society and from the reader. "Den Nachtwächter zu charakterisieren, ist ein fragwürdiges Unterfangen, es setzt nämlich voraus, daß er einen Charakter hat."[215] At some point, then, the question must be asked to what extent the narrator is an actual personality,

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[215] Peter Kohl, p. 125.

rather than a concept who, like the Devil, should be viewed as existing mainly on an allegorical plane.

The undermining of Kreuzgang's existence as even a literary character becomes very tempting. Kreuzgang's own name, a name which serves to disguise and eradicate, rather than substantiate personality is a case in point. The name 'Kreuzgang', a term born of the Christian religion, has several meanings, each of which symbolically underscores Kreuzgang's nature:

> [...] denn als Kreuzgang kann architektonisch ein Säulengang, theologisch der Leidensweg, brauchtümlich der Wallfahrtsweg mit seinen vierzehn Stationen, alchimistisch der Ort der Geisterbeschwörung, der Treffpunkt der Hexen, der Toten und des Teufels angesehen werden.[216]

Doubtlessly, therefore, the name 'Kreuzgang' has a twofold task. On the one hand, it betrays the essence of Kreuzgang's being, as the narrator is, on the one hand, engaged in a negative form of pilgrimage, and, at the same time, is forced, at least symbolically, to conjure up and utilize the concept of the Devil, even if he later dismisses him. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, the lack of a 'name', also means that Kreuzgang lacks an identity. Convention teaches the indiviudal to identify an object by giving it a name. While the name 'Kreuzgang' serves to introduce a wide variety of connotations, it deflects away from Kreuzgang's own personality, making the narrator appear even more elusive and

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[216] Peter Küpper, p. 324.

vague than he already is. While Wolfgang Paulsen stretches the point somewhat, his conclusions are still valid:

> Einen Menschen Kreuzgang jedenfalls gibt es nicht - was ja eigentlich auch schon der Name, der kein Name ist, besagt. Kreuzgang bleibt bis zuletzt so unwahrscheinlich, rätselhaft, paradox, wie er schon als Findling gewesen war [...].[217]

In this manner, then, Kreuzgang, like the character of the Devil, must be interpreted to exist both as a concept, and as a character[218]. In this fashion, Bonaventura has, at a very early time, broken with narrative traditions. Interpretation reveals that, in fact, there is not one well rounded character in the work. The character exists as a vehicle to incorporate and carry an idea, and Kreuzgang, as such, represents simply the most complete and complex concept in the Nachtwachen. It is no wonder that the protagonist thus continually compares himself to the Hanswurst. Not only thematically, but also as a character, the narrator distinguishes himself in his closeness to his beloved puppet.

> Man wird sich der Auffassung zueignen, der Nachtwächter, der überall so besondere Vorliebe für Marionetten bezeugt, sei selbst nicht eigentlich als Mensch, sondern als Marionette aufzufassen [...].[219]

Unlike the other 'characters', which represent either one or

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[217] Wofgang Paulsen p. 475.

[218] Conventional storytelling provides the reader with a well-rounded character, who, for better or worse, appears 'human'. Bonaventura has abandoned the 'human' character in favor of a character who acts as a vehicle to carry a certain set of ideas.

[219] Hermann Korff, p. 225.

a series of ideas, the night-watchman distinguishes himself further in that he has a role to play in the text. As such, a similarity can again be drawn to the character of the Devil, who also plays a series of roles. Kreuzgang's role, however, is somewhat more concrete. He serves, and in this function he finds an accomplice in the Devil, to make a sleeping world aware of the hypocrisy of its own behaviour, as well as the behaviour of the surrounding world. "Er [Kreuzgang] wacht nicht, sondern er weckt auf."[220] Kreuzgang's 'function', in this case, is reinforced by the fact that the highest goal in his world is survival, for which he is willing to accept compromise, and for which he is willing to endure humiliating and blistering personal defeats.

> Though most of his alter agos die, the watchman is not self-destructive; he is not so much a nihilist as he is a negativist, telling us how much the world is wrong, an exponent here of radical Romantic criticism.[221]

Survival, in this case, indicates two things. True to his role as a 'character', Kreuzgang must survive, or he would not be able to confront the 'Nichts', which represents, without a doubt, the book's climax. Furthermore, his willingness to endure, to suffer, and to survive, indicates that in Kreuzgang there remains at least a latent desire to live, and his repeated attempts to locate a reason to exist indicate that

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[220] Peter Küpper, p. 310.

[221] Norman Brown, p. 82.

Kreuzgang is still very much a part of the world he continually exposes. The narrator is, after all, anything but indifferent and one of his overriding personality traits is his repeated passion and zeal in confronting the obstacles in his path.

While Kreuzgang cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be regarded as a fully 'fleshed out' character, he does portray two very distinguishing personality traits. One is his somewhat surprising moralistic quality. The would-be nihilist repeatedly reveals himself to be a moralist. Whether he is criticizing adultery (III, pp. 32-36), or falling in love, (XIV), the watchman reveals that he does, have a moral conscience, even if he is engaged in the process of unmasking society. The Devil, Kreuzgang's cautious ally, becomes, in an ironic twist, the spokesman for morality, as, in the absence of God, no other spiritual 'force' is capable of assuming this role. "Der Teufel in der Rolle des Moralisten ist der Ausdruck eines allgemeinen Krisenbewußtseins nach den Umwälzungen in Kultur und Politik."[222]

Kreuzgang's other distinguishing characteristic, and one with which this thesis has dealt again and again, is his intrinsic need to idealize. While it is true, as Rosemarie Hunter-Lougheed postulates, that "Man seeking his ideal cannot

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222 Peter Kohl, p 148.

at the same time be man devoid of hope",[223] it must be added that man[224], if he continually visualizes, but never achieves any of his ideals is bound to become angry, frustrated and confused. If the foundation that many of these ideals are based on, and this is the case with the Nachtwachen, are also undermined, then Hunter-Lougheed's statement must be viewed as somewhat naive. Even the most resolute survivor, and the "radikalste Idealist",[225] when faced with continual defeat, is capable of losing hope. The novel details this process, when even the last vestige of hope fades away in the echo at the end of the novel. As such, then, Kreuzgang undermines himself in that he abhors mediocrity, and continually searches for something in which he can manifest any form of ideal.

> To his determination to know the essence of whatever he encounters in life Kreuzgang adds an impassioned and uncompromising demand for the absolute, or the ideal. Second best, imitations and mediocrity he abhors.[226]

The two qualities, morality and idealism, form the basis for the concept which Kreuzgang represents. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the scenario of the falsified Judgement Day. The night-watchman here, partly out of disgust

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[223] Rosemarie Hunter-Lougheed: "Nachtwachen von Bonaventura und Tristam Shandy." Canadian Review of Comparative Literature 1 (1974): p. 233.

[224] The example 'Kreuzgang' has been, in this example, expanded to encompass mankind in general.

[225] Hermann Korff, p 227.

[226] Judith Pond, p. 11.

for the mediocre and self-righteous masses by which he is surrounded, and partly out of desire to satirize both man and society, trumpets out the Judgement Day. As such, Kreuzgang momentarily assumes the role of a prophet, and becomes a "prophet in reverse",[227] who seeks to punish mankind by confronting it with its own ideals, ideals which every individual in the bourgeois world seems to have betrayed. Kreuzgang exposes a world which believes that it must suddenly pay for all its wrongdoing:

> O man hätte sehen sollen was das für ein Getreibe und Gedränge wurde unter den armen Menschenkindern und wie der Adel ängstlich durch einanderlief, und sich doch noch zu rangiren suchte vor seinem Herrgott; eine Menge Justiz - und andere Wölfe wollten aus ihrer Haut fahren und bemühten sich in voller Verzweiflung in arme Schaafe zu verwandeln [...]. (VI, p. 73)

Nowhere has Kreuzgang succeeded more in actually frightening society. "Der jüngste Tag reißt alle Masken ab."[228] Most poignantly, the individual can no longer hide behind the skirts of civilization and the roles appointed by society; every individual is confronted by his own ideals:

> Der Sinn dieser Jüngsten-Tag-Fiktion ist also, jeden einzelnen einmal vor sein eigenes Ideal zu stellen, ihn einmal jener Verdrängungen und Rationalisierungen zu entkleiden, damit ihm die Differenz zwischen dem, was er sein will und dem, was er ist, zwischen Schein und Sein, Maske und Wirklichkeit endlich aufgeht.[229]

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227 Jeffrey Sammons, p. 67.

228 Dorothee Sölle-Nipperdey, p. 63.

229 Walter Pfannkuche, p. 12.

There is, however, much more to this scene than the obvious and effective social satire in which Kreuzgang engages. The narrator does not only reveal the negative and mediocre aspects to society, he also reveals, in the process, his own tendency to moralise and idealise. The Judgement Day serves not only to scare the populace, but also to reprimand mankind, which has fallen from its self-proclaimed path of moral righteousness. The one who feels that society is in need of such a reprimand is none other than Kreuzgang, and as such he demonstrates that society has trespassed not only against its own moral standards, but also against his, the protagonist's, veiled moral standards. Kreuzgang acts in the name of a system whose foundations he has undermined, but whose spirit still serves as his own role model. "Er ist gleichsam der letzte Verkünder Gottes auf Erden, der letzte Christ."[230]

He is so disgusted by what he sees, however, that he invariably invokes the Devil, who he feels could hold an even more powerful speech to convince the populace of their evil mediocrity:

> O es hat mich toll und wild gemacht, und wie ich die Erdenbrut jezt vor mir herum kriechend erblicke mit ihren Verdiensten und Tugenden, so mögte ich nur auf eine Stunde bei diesem allgemeinen Weltgerichte der Teufel sein, blos um euch eine noch kräftigere Rede zu halten! - (VI, p. 79)

Thus, in the absence of God, the Devil becomes the ideal

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230 Walter Pfannkuche, p. 12.

spokesman for morality. Mankind has, however, proven itself to be so mediocre that even the Devil cannot be bothered to interfere. The populace is worthy of neither Heaven nor Hell, as both of these absolutes are too lofty for such miserable sinnners. "Ich seh's nicht anders ein! denn ihr alle, wie ich euch hier erblicke, könnt ihr mit Recht auf den Himmel oder die Hölle Anspruch machen? Für jenen seid ihr zu schlecht, für diese zu langweilig! -" (VI, p. 79) The result of the 'Judgement Day', needless to say, is that Kreuzgang is punished. Mankind, having survived the panic of being confronted by forgotten ideals, returns to its former mediocre and evil ways, and thus disregards the would-be 'prophet'.

This episode, however, is vitally important in that it demonstrates Kreuzgang's continuing closeness to the Christian model of existence. As both world and mankind invariably and consecutively unveil themselves as mediocre and uncaring, the narrator is driven to the Devil as his last place of refuge. While he does not 'believe' in a tangible Devil, he is unable to sever himself completely from his own Christian past, whose moral structure and need for absolute values he has inherited. On the one hand, the protagonist has destroyed the framework necessary to uphold a definitive theological system, on the other, he has not been able to dissolve the ties that bind him to the aging and outdated belief structure.

> Von Gott und dem Teufel konnte er reden, denn sie waren für ihn, der an beide nicht mehr glaubte (oder: nicht mehr glauben zu können glaubte!), legendäre Figuren in einem nebulösen Jenseits.

> Religion aber ist etwas, was das Innere des Menschen angeht, mit den Gefühlen etwas zu tun hat und deswegen in diesem Sinne auch wirklich etwas "Psychologisches" ist.[231]

Psychologically, then, Kreuzgang remains attached to the religion he has mercilessly exposed. As such, he knows he cannot, and indeed does not, receive spiritual satisfaction from the Christian doctrine.

> Definitiv festzuhalten bleibt, daß die christliche Heilsgewißheit für den Nachtwächter nicht in Betracht kommt. Himmel und Hölle haben ihre metaphysische Bedeutung verloren [...].[232]

While this may be the case, however, Kreuzgang still needs to find absolutes which he can use to orient and even express himself, and as such he re-adopts the Christian figureheads of God and the Devil. While during the course of the novel the Devil may become the more important of the two figureheads where Kreuzgang is concerned, it is important to remember, however, that the Devil forms only one of the two spiritual poles, both of which are present in the protagonist.

> Der Nachtwächter kultiviert das Teuflische als <u>einen</u> Bestandteil seines Charakters, denn außer dem illusionsfreien Blick auf seine Mitmenschen zeigt er gelegentlich Mitgefühl, was ihn eben nicht als reinen Gesinnungstyp wie Mephisto erscheinen läßt und einen Teil seiner Zwiespältigkeit und Ungreifbarkeit ausmacht.[233]

That both of these 'poles' are present in the night-

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[231] Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 506.

[232] Peter Kohl, p. 127.

[233] Peter Kohl, p. 149.

watchman is important. If the night-watchman was simply "Verneiner und Hasser von Natur"[234] and a "wahrhaftig nächtlicher und der Hölle entstiegener Geist",[235] the reader's sympathy would become entirely implausible. Kreuzgang becomes sympathetic because he suffers, and Kreuzgang's suffering is due to the fact that he, in attempting to define his spiritual universe, is continually cornered between the two poles of God and the Devil. As a spokesman for the Devil, the narrator would not be faced with such obstacles, and his task would be reduced in importance, as he would simply have to denounce the world. The novel proves itself, however, to be significantly more complex than just a philippic against Creation. It is the expression of a spiritually confused individual, who has to decide not only which of two moral and spiritual poles to follow, but also whether he believes in the system whose absolutes he has recreated.

During the course of the novel, it becomes increasingly apparent that the narrator identifies himself more and more closely with the character of the Devil, and that the pole represented by the Devil becomes the more viable of the two 'poles'. In a decadent, corrupt and chaotic society, whose every value he has undermined, and whose spiritual essence he has exposed, he naturally, and almost necessarily oscillates

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234 Hermann Korff, p. 227.

235 Hermann Korff, p. 214.

toward the Devil. In such a world the Devil poses as more credible and a more 'realistic' ideal than a God whose influence cannot be detected anywhere in Bonaventura's universe. While at the beginning, the narrator claims not to believe in the Devil, (III, p. 28), he increasingly looks to this concept for comfort. And indeed, the Devil becomes more and more tangible as the Nachtwachen progress, until he actually emerges as the, albeit allegorical, Godfather to the protagonist. Kreuzgang begins to identify himself with his spiritual benefactor to the point that even physical similarities are hinted at. Like the Devil, for example, Kreuzgang limps: "Mir fehlte zum Vulkan", the narrator informs the reader, "da ich von Natur hinkte, und nicht zum Besten aussah [...]" (III, p. 32). After Kreuzgang confronts his mother, mention is made again of Kreuzgang's appearance, and its relation to the figure of the Devil: "[...] er [the Devil] mochte ein angenehmer Mann in seinen besten Jahren sein, und ich erstaune über die Ähnlichkeit, die du mit ihm hast; nur siehst du finsterer aus, was du dir noch abgewöhnen dürftest" (XVI, p. 188). That an 'allegorical' similarity exists between the nebulous Devil and the elusive protagonist should come as no wonder to the reader. Family relationship aside, Kreuzgang has gradually begun to take on the Devil's role in the novel. It is not the Devil, but Kreuzgang, who has become the negating reality, and, although not the Devil's spokesman, the narrator has become increasingly forced to represent the

spirit whose existence he himself has made questionable.

For the most part, however, Kreuzgang's comparisons to the Devil remain hypothetical, as in the sixth (VI, p. 79) and the twelfth (XII, p. 148) night watches. "He trumpets his affinity with the Devil many a time as his own choice."[236] Characteristic to these comparisons, Kreuzgang feels no compunction about choosing the Devil to be his guiding light, and this again demonstrates the spiritual confusion and negativity of the environment Kreuzgang inhabits and upon which he comments.

> Kreuzgang's willingness to unite himself with the Devil reveals the extent of his desperation, and the open, precarious way he does so, without the shadow of an explanation, or a transition, is craven capitulation: precursor enough of disaster to come.[237]

The Devil, and the entire negativity around which the demonic and devilish elements of the novel center, are less an indication of Kreuzgang's affinity to evil than a sign of despair. While the Nachtwachen often express satirical contempt and often even horror, mention is almost never made of 'good' or 'evil', as these characteristics are no longer valid in Kreuzgang's estimation. This, of course, is also true of the character of the night-watchman, who cannot be judged in the traditional terminology, and who, even though he allies himself with the 'Devil', cannot be considered 'evil' nor an

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236 Norman Brown, p. 62.

237 Russel Neuswanger, "On Laughter", p. 17.

advocate of any such philosophy. "No moral judgement upon the watchman in terms of good and evil is made anywhere in the Nachtwachen; these categories lack content in Bonaventura's universe."[238] While morals and ideals remain important, and form the cornerstone to Kreuzgang's suffering, actual judgements and moral categories are strictly avoided in a novel in which moral absolutes, like God or the Devil, have been placed in doubt.

In short, then, Kreuzgang allies himself to the Devil because he requires, in order to continue to exist, an ideal, or an absolute value which can reinforce his own spiritual position. Based on the deductions the novel makes, and the negative conclusions in which Kreuzgang's observations culminate, the Devil is the only plausible value remaining. As the last night vigil demonstrates, however, even this last spiritual foothold becomes unveiled as a mask over 'Nichts'. This should come as no surprise, as Kreuzgang, who had re-created, to a certain extent, his 'belief' in the Devil, would have never been capable of sustaining faith in a spirit of his own creation. The tragedy of the Nachtwachen is, ultimately, that there is no guiding force, other than the heartless 'Nichts', and no spirit which, for better or worse, represents mankind's interests.

> Indeed, Kreuzgang - so far as we can tell by internal evidence - is the highest ironist in the book's world, and the cause of his suffering is that

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[238] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 114.

> he cannot honestly detect the sway of any supreme author worthy of reverence.[239]

If Kreuzgang is, finally, to be accepted both as a concept and as a character, then his flirtation with the Devil represents the attitude of the modern individual, who, having become aware of the spiritual void of his own time, is frightened into attempting to adopt a vision from the past to make life bearable. Man, confronted by a new order, seeks refuge in the traditional, well known spiritual values which, in the end, fails to satisfy his needs. "He [Kreuzgang] talks repeatedly in terms of heaven and Hell, God and the Devil, but it is actually a new vision he is seeking."[240] Kreuzgang's acceptance of the Devil is not only "die Religion eines gefallenen Engels", nor "invertierter klassischer Humanismus",[241] it represents the frustration of modern man who, unable to find answers in either conventional religion, or in an impotent humanism, has sought to utilize the ideals of bygone days to confront the spiritual danger he now faces. Even by enlisting the Devil, Kreuzgang cannot accomodate the 'Nichts' into any kind of acceptable theological constellation. If mankind hopes to overcome 'Nothingness' the Nachtwachen demonstrate, then mankind must discover a new set of ideals and morals.

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239 Gerald Gillespie: "Bonaventura's Romantic Agony", p. 704.

240 Norman Brown p. 32.

241 Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 510.

6.5 The Devil and the 'Nichts'

The only aspect to remain intact in Kreuzgang's universe at the end of the novel is nothingness. As has been shown, demonic processes in art, nature, society and religion all irrevocably terminate in the 'Nichts', and Kreuzgang, as an individual, also finds himself confronted by an emptiness that he cannot avoid. While the Devil does, undeniably, play a major role in the Nachtwachen, he too, both as an allegorical spirit and as a concept, cannot outlive the nihilism which encompasses and negates the entire religious framework of which he is also a part. The central question, then, in regards to the figure of the Devil and the impact of a 'devilish' attitude on the work, is whether at all, and if so how, the Devil can introduce and coexist with the 'Nichts'.

When it comes to the question of the 'Nichts' the critics are divided.

> Hier ist einer der am meisten umstrittenen Punkte der Nachtwachen-Interpretationen erreicht. Nihilistisches Kunstwerk, Apotheose des Nihilismus oder Darstellung der Gefahren des Nihilismus - so lauten in etwa die Alternativen der Diskussion.[242]

Some, like Kathy Brzovic, feel that the 'Nichts' represents only a transitional, not terminal, spiritual condition, and that it can be overcome. "Although the use of this word

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[242] Jörg Schönert, p. 219.

[Nichts] definitely signifies a negation of some sort, it does not, however, necessarily represent a negation of the possibility of ever finding any meaning in life."[243] Though optimistic, this view cannot be substantiated in the text. While it would appear senseless to write, as Kreuzgang does, in the face of such nihilism, the writing of his Nachtwachen remains Kreuzgang's only outlet. Rather than suggesting an alternative, writing, even in private and for a select audience, gives the protagonist a means of survival, and, as such, the act of writing should be interpreted only as such. It is a lifeline for a character confronted and enveloped by a horror which makes even the act of simply continuing to exist appear meaningless. Others, like Richard Brinkmann, hesitate to legitimize the all-encompassing characteristic of the Nachtwachen, reasoning, perhaps, that such an elaborately constructed and continually elusive piece of literature could not terminate in such a negative and straightforward manner. "Man würde", he argues, "die Nachtwachen entscheidend mißverstehen, wenn man das 'Nichts' unmittelbar und nur 'ernst' im Sinne eines simplifizierten 'Nihilismus' nahme."[244]

While not simplified, the 'Nichts' can and must be interpreted, however, in precisely this fashion, as no other criterion exists by which to judge.

Wo Aussenwelt und Innenwelt gleichermassen negativ

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[243] Kathy Brzovic, p. 380.

[244] Richard Brinkmann, p. 29.

> aufgefasst werden, wo das Irdische angefeindet und das Uebernirdische verneint wird, bleibt nur der krasseste Nihilismus übrig. Wirklich sind nur das Nichts und der Tod.[245]

Furthermore, even though the 'Nichts' spells the end for religion of any sort, religion, and, in this case, specifically the Christian religion, is a quintessential necessity in the formation of a systematic belief in nothingness. While it is obvious that if the possibility of God is negated, then a belief in the Devil, as the Nachtwachen demonstrate, becomes equally untenable. "Der Nihilismus hat alle Ideale, oder, wie Nietzsche sagt, alle Götzen gestürzt."[246] The Devil, as he is, even in a negative sense, an ideal, is thus also negated, as are the values he represents. "Even negative values cannot stand up in the chaos of the universe."[247]

Even if the Devil and his pessimism are negated in the end, however, it does not mean that he is not instrumental in the creation of the 'Nichts'. Undeniably, it is the Devil who, coupled with the systematic absence of God, helps to create first doubt in the existing order of things, and afterwards helps to destroy the negated system. A modern interpretation of the Devil, such as the Nachtwachen provides, must view the

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[245] Herman Meyer: Der Typus des Sonderlings in der deutschen Literatur. Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1943. p. 101.

[246] Walter Brocker, p. 172.

[247] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 95.

Devil not only as the patron of evil, but also as the patron of chaos. If it is his task, it can be argued, to negate the spiritual order of Creation, then would it not be the Devil who stands to gain the most from a destruction of the possibility of belief, even if this means that he himself is also negated as a spiritual possibility? Clearly, to one schooled in Christian theology, and one who does not yet have the benefit of modern philosophy to fall back on, Nihilism, in the vehemently negative form in which it presents itself, must be a product of the Devil. "Die Philosophie des Teufels, des Geistes, der stets verneint, dürfte dabei der Nihilismus sein."[248]

That Kreuzgang arrives at his nihilistic conclusions should come as no surprise, especially as both the term and concept of 'Nichts' appear repeatedly throughout the book. The fact that the protagonist has not been able to sever himself completely from the spiritual framework in which he has been raised also becomes apparent in the shape that this particular 'Nichts' takes. Nothingness, if viewed objectively, cannot be frightening, threatening or dangerous. It has neither positive nor negative qualities. In the Nachtwachen the 'Nichts' does, however, possess an intrinsic value. It does have a spiritual focus which, true to its character, centers around its own nothingness. In absence of anything

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[248] Andreas Mielke, p. 198.

else, Kreuzgang begins to regard the 'Nichts' as a substitute for religion, and thus assigns to the 'Nichts' values it does not posses. "Quite literally, he [Kreuzgang] believes in nothing: not merely not in anything, but actually in Nothingness, as a negation of all existence [...]."[249] As such, the 'Nichts' takes on values, which invariably turn out to be negative. As it cannot be, as a concept, grasped, and as it does not offer any hope of salvation or redemption, belief in the 'Nichts' fosters negative reactions, and, diabolically enough, the values of fear, horror and evil, which have, to date, characterized the Devil, are transferred, laterally, onto the characterless 'Nichts'. Again, the Devil's fingerprints appear all over this process, and Kreuzgang's horror, at the end, is proof enough of the fact that he still cannot accept the 'Nichts', and that he, furthermore, remains closely bound to the intellectual mode of thinking, reflected by religion, which he has both negated and apparently overcome.

As if to quash this process, and as if to negate the possibility of the 'Nichts' becoming the new 'God', Bonaventura slyly discredits even the apparent value of 'nothingness' at the end of the novel. The 'Nichts' which Kreuzgang utters is thrown back into his face in the form of an echo (XVI, p. 199). Even 'Nichts' becomes substanceless.

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[249] Russel Neuswanger, Central Motifs, p. 22.

The ability of even expression is negated. What is left at this point is literally nothing. The echo, furthermore, exhibits not only doomed hope, but also a satirical smirk. What was almost grasped has now, once again, elusively slipped away, and the narrator is exposed as a ridiculous fool. "Doch ein Echo ist keine Antwort, sondern Afferei."[250] If we remind ourselves of the fact that in the Nachtwachen the Devil is held responsible for the concept of the echo ((XVI, p. 186), then the downward spiral of the novel continues, accompanied by the hellish laughter of the anonymous Bonaventura, who has duped both his protagonist and his reader, and has concocted the perfect 'Catch-22' situation, in which there is no way out of the existential trap.

To conclude the train of thought, the 'Nichts', an inadvertant product of a crumbling Christianity, swollows the whole belief structure which gave it birth. If the Devil acted as an allegorical force before the triumph of 'nothingness', then he has lost even this distinguishing characteristic. The child has swallowed its parents. "Es ist nicht mehr der Schöpfer, der ex nihilo schafft, sondern das Nichts schafft selbst, um alles wieder in sich zurückzusaugen."[251] Kreuzgang, who has exposed and unmasked all the layers he can find in humanity, society and himself, is, logically, confronted by

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250 Peter Küpper, p. 317.

251 Dieter Arendt, p. 526.

nothingness. "Was bleibt, wenn die Masken verschwinden, ist das Nichts."[252] While the Devil and the demonic characteristics Kreuzgang unveils in his world are of prime importance, the fact cannot be denied that it is the 'Nichts' which has captivated Bonaventura's attention. The author of the novel, in the end, does not provide the reader with enough spiritual fibre to clarify any theological position.

> Thus, on the one hand, depending upon the context, he [Bonaventura] makes immortality appear as an arrogant and foolish dream, and on the other hand as a threat of cosmic proportions. The emotional impact is the same: gloom, pessimism and fear. It is with the achievement of this impact that Bonaventura is concerned, not with specific theological assertion.[253]

What does emerge clearly from the text is that the 'Nichts' would have been impossible to conceive without the Devil. In a post-Nietzsche era, the figure of the Devil loses in importance in regard to the 'Nichts', but nothingness also partially loses the frightening aspect that its dominance arouses in the protagonist. Bonaventura expresses what many other artists will discover much later, namely the silence of a god-less world. "Modern ausgedrückt: Der Mensch fragt, die Welt schweigt. Deshalb steht am Ende Nichts."[254] This, the total silence in which the work culminates, and the lack of hope in any kind of hereafter, suffice to turn the existence

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[252] Richard Brinkmann, p. 12.

[253] Jeffrey Sammons, p. 97.

[254] Franz Loquai, p. 155.

of the protagonist into a living hell. "Kreuzgang ist in dieser Welt gleichsam eingesperrt wie in der Hölle."[255] Perhaps, in the end, the non-existent Devil does retain the last laugh. The all-encompassing Nothingness, having negated everything, has turned life into a hell that the Devil, in his wildest dreams, could not hope to match.

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[255] Dieter Arendt, p. 532.

7. Conclusion

As this thesis demonstrates, the Devil, as well as his influence on the demonic processes which are instrumental in the unmasking of religion, society, art and nature, is indispensible to the thematic fabric of the Nachtwachen. In the shadow of a character he has himself basically undermined, the protagonist can question, criticize and finally negate every value he encounters. The Devil provides him with a spiritual foothold where no other is available, and proves himself to be a cautious ally to Kreuzgang, who attempts to resurrect the Devil, lastly, as the only plausible ideal in a disintegrating world.

God, as the Creator, has either been completely negated or has no longer any interest in his human creation. "Man, the puppet of a mad or bumbling God, is only a crude jest; and the imaginary audience laughs at his despair."[256] The Nachtwachen go far beyond portraying an "ernstes Symptom"[257] of a diabolically nihilistic universe. Instead they present the impact of the 'Nichts' on a helpless individual who cannot hold off the onsetting chaos he has helped to create. As such,

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[256] Russel Neuswanger, "On Laughter", p. 18.

[257] Hermann Korff, p. 227.

the Nachtwachen represent, as Russel Neuswanger postulates, "the known extreme of literary nihilism [...]."[258]

That the Devil's 'fingerprints' can be found all over the novel becomes quickly obvious. As the ultimate negating spirit, everything that had given life value, be it religion, art, place and position in a just and humane society, or an idyllic return to nature, he has managed to influence every possible ideal in such a manner that it has become preverted to the point of hopelessness. What the Nachtwachen detail, is what Hermann Korff refers to as the "subjektivistischste Verzerrung des Idealismus [...]",[259] or what more modern critics could refer to as "romantischen Existenzialismus [...]."[260] Regardless of the terminology, certain is that the 'Nichts' offers no alternatives, and that there is no return from the abyss to a comfortable world view in which every value and concept has its place. The 'Nichts', to draw a dubious parallel, is thus a modern manifestation of the age-old concept of the Devil. As a thoroughly negative and pessimistic concept, which invokes fear and horror, the 'Nichts' has effectively replaced the Devil, whom the Nachtwachen indirectly and allegorically present as the spiritual antecedent to the nothingness which now dominates

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258 Russel Neuswanger, "On Laughter", p. 22.

259 Hermann Korff, p. 227.

260 Werner Kohlschmidt, p. 96.

the spiritual and intellectual future not only of Kreuzgang, but of a collective mankind.

As such, then, and unlike the atheist whom the reader encounters in the first three night vigils Kreuzgang's vision of nothingness has no redeeming or positive characteristics. The atheist represents an individual who has merely negated the vision of an afterlife in a Christian context. The Devil has been as effectively shut out as has God. The bitter satire, as well as the 'demonic' desire to expose the empty core underlying man's ideals are missing in the atheist. This, however, is not the case with Kruezgang: "But in the course of the work, we begin to realize that Bonaventura's mockery rests on no positive convictions."[261] The lack of positive convictions, of which Gillespie writes, is due to the fact that to an intelligent observer such as Kreuzgang, not only the Christian belief in the hereafter is tainted with hypocrisy. The waking world, which confronts the night-watchman as an unavoidable reality, is just as tainted by hypocrisy as is the hereafter. Not only the 'Jenseits, therefore, falls victim to the protagonist's scorn, but also the 'Diesseits. It is here that the allegorical and somewhat 'unbelievable' Devil comes in. Without the destruction of the 'real' world, a hope would remain for a positive outcome to the novel, but with the destruction of both the 'real' and the

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261 Gerald Gillespie, "Bonaventura's Romantic Agony", p. 708.

spiritual world, there is no hope. While some critics continue to postulate that the end of the novel is "durchaus hoffnungsvoll",[262] there is simply no evidence in the text to support such conclusions. A product of emptiness and negativity, the 'Nichts' in turn radiates emptiness and negativity.

What marks the Nachtwachen, perhaps more than any other work in German literature, is the inescapable quality of the 'nothingness' at the end of the novel. Many other works of literature, both before and after the Nachtwachen, are willing to utilize the figure of the Devil, and the 'demonic' influence present on soul and spirit in the novel are by no means limited to this one work. The theme of 'das Dämonische' echoes throughout the art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and each time reflects a negative process which undermines and destroys values once thought incorruptible. In none of these works, however, be it Goethe's Faust or Thomas Mann's Der Zauberberg, does this theme present such all encompassing characteristics. The Nachtwachen, therefore, are more than simply an "avant garde terror novel [...]",[263] they detail, in almost visionary fashion, the processes at work in theology, art and society. In all of these areas, art continues to expose, unmask and question, and the themes of

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[262] Linde Katritzky, p. 163.

[263] Norman Brown, p. 59.

the 'demonic' and the Devil will continue to dominate. In no other novel, however, is this theme so condensed and all-encompassing, and in no other work of art is it depicted in such a condensed format. Even if the Devil ceases, in the course of the Nachtwachen, to be a viable spiritual alternative, the values which he perpetuates continue to exist:

> Thus Jakob Böhme's concept of a contest in the very processes of the universe between Love and Hate may be as familiar in the Nachtwachen as it is generally in German romanticism. But instead of hinting at some ultimate transfiguration of life, Bonaventura announces a triumph of darkness and hate.[264]

Perhaps the most frightening aspect to the novel is that there is no alternative to the 'Nichts'. Undeniably a negative sinkhole, there are no alternatives to it. Any other alternative involves faith and belief, both of which are categorically negated in the Nachtwachen. All ideals, even nothingness itself, is exposed as illusion. "Abschließend ist es [the Nachtwachen] nur insofern, als ein Schritt auf dem Wege über dieses 'Nichts' hinaus nicht mehr möglich, überhaupt nicht mehr denkbar ist. Hier hört der Mensch mit seinem Verstande auf."[265] That even a Kreuzgang, who is a child of his age and is, even if the Devil is indirectly involved in his lineage, a product of a Christian heritage, would shy back

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[264] Gerald Gillespie: "Bonaventura's Romantic Agony", pp. 713-14.

[265] Wolfgang Paulsen, p. 503.

from a monstrosity so horrific as this 'Nichts' is not surprising. In the face of such a void, even a Devil more 'evil' than the one encountered in the Nachtwachen would make a welcome ally. Poetic justice demands, however, that even the Devil cannot outlive his own'negative 'Creation'. A new world demands a new Devil.

In conclusion, the only fault that can be found with this unique work is that perhaps it went too far. The destruction, both spiritually and intellectually, that takes place in the Nachtwachen is simply too extreme for most readers, and is unpalatable even for most critics. As Jeffrey Sammons correctly notes: "The Nachtwachen occupies a lonely place in German literature. It has few significant antecedents, and no direct descendents at all."[266] The truly surprising quality of this work, however, is how modern it seems, even to readers of the present generation. Bonaventura has, before the publication of Faust, and many years before Nietzsche, tested the limits of both the 'Mephistophelian' and the 'Nihilistic' world view, and has convincingly introduced themes that would occupy not only art, but a collective culture, for over a century. While many modern critics agree that the influence of 'das Dämonische', both on art and on culture, should not be overvalued, it cannot be denied that this influence played a decisive role in the direction taken by German art and

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[266] Jeffrey L. Sammons, p. 120.

culture. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Bonaventura's Nachtwachen.

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